

AWAKEN YOUR GENIUS



A Seven-Step Path to Freeing Your Creativity
and Manifesting Your Dreams

Carolyn Elliott

More praise for *Awaken Your Genius*

“In a voice that might remind you of a spritely Jane Austen, Elliott guides her reader on a nimble journey in which she illuminates with insight, logic, and love the path toward awakening your genius. It’s a spiritual quest aided in the romantic ideals of truth and beauty, where wisdom and whimsy merge as Elliot guides us on the path toward hearing our own heart’s call, revealing in the process the reality of a wisdom-deficient world, while simultaneously leading us on the hero’s journey of creativity, innocence, and love.”

—Robin Gunkel, writer, regional coordinator for Evolver
Baltimore, and graduate of the Jack Kerouac School of
Disembodied Poetics

◆ Also by Carolyn Elliott
The Arcana
The Poetical Remains of the Late
Mrs. Shivshakti Khattananda

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Manifesting Your Dreams

CAROLYN ELLIOTT

 **EVOLVER
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Berkeley, California

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*To all the dear, crazy geniuses in the world.
Especially to my mother and father, Linda and
Carmon Elliott, who nurtured my genius with
their own. And to my brother, Damon Elliott,
who's smarter than he looks.*

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CONTENTS

Cover

Other Books by This Author

Title Page

Copyright

Dedication

Acknowledgments

Dear Reader

Introduction: **Entering the Mythic Journey and Making Your Soul**

Key Concepts: **What Makes Awakening Possible**

Your Tools: **Technologies for Waking Your Genius**

Step One: **Hearing Your Heart's Call**

Step Two: **Accepting the Call**

Step Three: **Meeting Your Guide**

Step Four: **Crossing the Threshold**

Step Five: **Enduring Trials**

Step Six: **Becoming Divine**

Step Seven: Taming Your Genius

Epilogue: Connections

About the Author

About the Cover Artist

DEAR READER

I'm a dreamer who works with magic people (also known as dreamers) to help them awaken their genius and be more magic. Is that crystal clear? Probably not. Allow me to explain.

In ancient Rome a “genius” was the guiding, instructive spirit associated with a house or a place or a person. It was something that sprang up and showed you how to do things that were beyond your conscious knowledge. The philosopher Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Judgement*, said that out of this early definition arose the notion that genius was “a talent for producing that for which no definite rule can be given.” In other words, when we've produced something out of our genius, we don't know how to tell others how to create exactly the same result, because what we've produced is somehow essential to and indivisible from our own best self.

Genius is a generative energy that manifests creations that are original, alive, and individual—*soulful*. It's the essence of your creative unconscious. Everyone has genius because everyone has a soul. Dreamers are people who are particularly awake and sensitive to the power within them, and this awareness makes their genius spirit active and potent—so much so that their ability to vividly and powerfully create from their own original essence is their distinguishing feature. But this potent genius spirit is also something that often gets them into a lot of trouble and pain. Why? Because the mad world we live in and its established institutions really are not big fans of true originality (it's a major threat to the status quo). So having a powerful genius can cause suffering by getting you into much more conflict with the powers-that-be than regular folks endure.

Furthermore, the threats faced by a person who has a very active genius (I call these folks dreamers because they're dreaming their lives

into being and at some level they're magic and they know it) don't just come from without.

The genius demon or daimon holds our creative power, but it's a tricky thing with a will of its own. The presence of the daimon in our lives needs to be strongly balanced by the heartfelt practice of spiritual principles, or else we can easily be devoured by our own genius.

Why? Because the daimon spirit is hungry—very, very hungry. It craves energy. Its true nurturing food is love energy, but if it can't get that real nurturing food (and often it can't, because, as I've just noted, the outside world tends to be extremely hostile to genius rather than offering it big cuddly piles of love), then it will grab dangerous substitute sources of energy—like drugs and other destructive means of getting “high.”

Love (and I don't mean lust or infatuation—I mean clear, open, divine love or metta) is the only high that's real—that has no negative side effects, that creates long-lasting, positive evolution. Because geniuses can't count on getting love from outside sources, they need to learn to cultivate love energy from within. That's a piece of what this book teaches you to do.

Now if you are currently suffering a lot, you may be disinclined to regard yourself as possessing real genius, since the term generally has positive cultural connotations. When we think of geniuses, great artists and scientists come to mind—folks like Emily Dickinson and Leonardo da Vinci. Yet these highly regarded geniuses are just the ones who figured out how to direct their creative power in a positive, illuminating way. The world is filled with geniuses who are completely miserable—and I don't just mean suicidal poets and recluse chess prodigies. I mean people whose primary masterful creation is a life so cramped, repetitive, and depressing that it could be a Beckett play.

My life has been a Beckett play more often than I care to admit, complete with weird clown outfits and non sequitur French puns. Maybe you're in a similar situation right now. Or maybe your life is pretty okay, but you would prefer it to be unremittingly awesome. Either way, I think I can help.

What This Book Does

This book presents insights and experiments designed to help dreamers become free from suffering and rich with joy. It invites them to become fully awake and lucid in their dream of life by leading them to live their deep story, the story that the author Paulo Coelho in his beloved book *The Alchemist* called “your personal legend.” Your personal legend is the story of how you discover and tame your unique daimon spirit (i.e., your own personal genius, true self, or soul). Your daimon is the priceless treasure that your intuition, your dreams, your heart call you to unearth.

In order to live your personal legend and discover your genius, you need to answer the call and meet the challenges that confront you on your way. I call this process “soulmaking,” because it involves deliberately cultivating your soul through spiritual practice, creativity, and imagination. The great psychologist Carl Jung called this process “individuation.” Living your personal legend makes you a genuine individual, because the journey to your distinctive genius daimon demands that you break with the social conditioning that creates your reactive ego and learn to live instead from your own original enlightened essence and inner authority.

So Wait Now ... Am I a Dreamer?

Yes. Here are some prominent indications:

- ✦ You're brilliant, far out, and sexy. (Even if it's hard for you to admit.)
- ✦ You're a little bit obsessed with magick, theater, tantra, poetry, ritual,entheogens, cosmic consciousness, labyrinths, alchemy, the tarot, kundalini awakening, psychic phenomenon, oracular prophecy, shamanic journeys, and, in general, the dreamy side of life.

- ✦ You encounter profound experiences of synchronicity.
- ✦ Lots of people throughout your time on this planet have told you that you're way too weird and have made fun of you or otherwise put you down.
- ✦ You've always felt a lot more aware and awake than the folks around you appear to be.
- ✦ You're always interested in learning and creating, and not so much interested in consuming or getting conventional success.
- ✦ The vast majority of television and popular entertainment bores you.
- ✦ You don't feel like you fit into mainstream society, and most every regular job description out there sounds to you like a circle of Dante's hell.

Sound familiar? Great! You're in the right place. An important thing to realize, too, is that everyone is magic and everyone is a dreamer—but some people just aren't yet at the place in their journey where they're ready to acknowledge their own magic-ness.

It's important for you to know, also, that as a dreamer your genius spirit holds the keys to your most magnificent sexual, creative, and spiritual expression. Once you meet her (or him—I alternate between the masculine and feminine pronouns throughout this book), she will lead you on her own terms in the most profound initiation possible. That initiation is entirely personal and uniquely tailored to you. This book provides you with a series of stepping stones designed to lead you to the point that your genius can take over and lead you herself. This is the work of self-realization.

The path as a whole is a spiraling one. It repeats itself in greater and greater iterations. This book leads you through accepting a call, meeting with a guide, crossing a threshold, facing trials, becoming divine, and bringing your gifts to the world. Your genius will meet you on the last leg of this cycle. From there, she will take you on another cycle of the journey with its own call, threshold, guides, obstacles, experience of divinity, and return to the world. Her iteration will be deeper and more far reaching than this one.

Which is not to say that this cycle of the spiral is not deep in and of itself. It is, very much. It's a potent beginning that acquaints you with

the tools of imagination, meditation, and creative expression that you'll need in order to have an ongoing relationship with your genius.

My work is to help dreamers find their way to a life of grounded and practical ecstasy. Because what's the good of being brilliant if you're not thrillingly happy and running over like an ivory bathtub filled with bubbles of love?

I've seen many magic people with potent genius not persist in finding their way to grounded ecstatic joy and instead die from drug overdose or suicide, or just live for many years in resentful misery. It's something that happens all too easily, because finding the path to consistent joy requires wisdom, and our present society is massively wisdom deficient.

On Wisdom Deficiency

It feels awful to grow up in a wisdom-deficient culture. It feels like facing insult after insult with very little deep acknowledgment from institutions or authority or even family of the incredible wonder that we are. It feels like getting punished with poverty for having the gall to want to do something with your life that isn't all about making money or serving a corporation.

It stings to have one's most profound experiences mocked and belittled by secular science and labeled heresy by organized religion. It's harrowing to drive through a suburban landscape and see one after another of the same bright, boxy stores selling bright, boxy things and only paying their employees minimum wage. It feels as if our teachers and parents have betrayed us by handing us a world that is so massively messed up. Weren't they supposed to have figured things out before we got here? Weren't they supposed to show us how to live meaningfully and richly, with beauty and dignity and grace?

Our schools, colleges, churches, and media tend to teach information, dogma, science, and gossip—they teach everything *but* wisdom, that practical knowledge necessary to transmute the dross and pain of life into the gold of gigantic love and joy.

This wisdom is alchemy, also known as tantra, or yoga—it's a process with thousands of ancient and elaborate variations that nonetheless can

also be completely workable, usable, and applicable by anyone who sincerely longs for the great depth and bliss possible in this life.

In alchemy, humans labor to unite the opposite elements of their nature into one transcendent whole. The labor involves a series of purifications and trials. It's the greatest journey: the movement from an ordinary state of consciousness into ecstatic self-realization. In this process, the conscious unites with the unconscious. The Shiva, or witnessing awareness, joins with the Shakti, or sexual energy.

In the nineteenth century, the democratization of this process in the Western world began. Through mass media, thinkers like Friedrich Goethe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Madame Helena Blavatsky addressed unprecedentedly large audiences with their insights into the age-old processes of consciousness evolution. In the twentieth century, teachers from India like Paramahansa Yogananda appeared in the West and gained large followings. Carl Jung published his realizations about how a process he called "active imagination" could help people bring themselves to wholeness without the help of an analyst.

Following on Jung, Joseph Campbell identified the underlying alchemical patterns of the hero's journey, which pervades world mythologies and folktales. Now, in the twenty-first century, the internet has made this knowledge more widely available than ever before.

Yet while information about this alchemical spiritual work is now more freely available and more urgently needed than ever, it can be overwhelming and tough to navigate and apply without specific guidance.

The present book is a seven-part journey designed to take you through a cycle of the deep journey. It gives you tools and acquaints you with concepts that you can use to navigate the whole of your lifelong trip. After the seven steps are done, will you be fully rocketed into ecstatic-bliss-joy-love-realization? It's possible—it depends upon how ripe you are right now. I can promise you that the work you do will take you far toward your destination and will bring you in touch with delicious synchronicity and galloping creativity.

After you've been through this trip, you'll be more *you* than you ever have been before.

My Story

Back when I was a young dreamer, I did drugs. A lot. And not just the good ones. I did the nasty ones too. Nearly to the point of killing myself. I was desperate. I felt miserable being me, I was pretty sure I hated you, and I didn't want to have to deal with you, my life, and myself in our unadulterated condition. I was suffering from my genius. I wanted to feel different. I wanted to feel better.

I've been clean for years through the grace of various powers greater than myself—but as it turns out today I still get miserable sometimes and I want to feel different. I want to live my life in ecstasy, and I don't think that's too much to ask for myself or anyone else.

The really cool thing is that today I know how to bring myself into ecstatic states using the tools and principles I've presented in this book, and I know how to deliberately interact with my creative unconscious so that it raises me up nowadays, instead of pulling me down into obsession and hell.

Over the years, I've met a lot of suffering dreamers. Not every dreamer turns to drugs. Some prefer anonymous sex or self-cutting or plain old never-leave-the-house-only-eat-ice-cream depression. Some are just chronically reticent and shy—so wounded by the meanness of the mad world that they're scared to let their light shine.

I'm sick of seeing magic people suffer because of their genius; I'm sick of feeling my own suffering. I want to take every genius in the world and make her feel safe and adored. I want to make sure she's well fed and well comforted. I want to make her lose that cagey, suspicious look she has—the look that comes from a lifetime of being abused by a world that fears and envies and devalues her for her creative gift. This is my den-mother instinct. I've practiced it for a long while on the geniuses within my immediate local reach, and now I'm trying to spread it everywhere.

I devised the journey in this book to lead me to a point where my own genius brought me joy rather than suffering. I read a ton of Kierkegaard, Emerson, Whitman, Dickinson, Nietzsche, Rilke, Heidegger, Jung, Neruda, Campbell. Along the way I became a professor of the gay science—someone who does the kind of philosophy that sings and sizzles. I distilled everything I learned into a workable and simple path

that I could follow. Before I designed and set out on this path, I was limping through life, clean and grateful but lacking a clear sense of myself and suffering as the slave of the mad world's abuse and my own inner conflict.

Happily though, the journey I devised worked. I became me, but more so. More vivid. More clear. More authoritative. A hell of a lot less scared to be myself and let my freak flag fly. I experienced the glee of feeling that my life was a work of art that I shaped as I moved through it, rather than a terrible burden. I connected with more and more people who felt truly right for me. I found a fantastic partner. I wrote this present work. I won a big book contest (on Twitter!) that encouraged me immensely.

I helped to throw some epic parties with my Evolver friends. I broke up with my partner. I co-organized the first international convergence for the Evolver Network. I found another great partner. I had my heart and life scorched to cinder in that affair and rose from the ashes more in love with the universe and all my past partners than ever before. In short, wonderful and terrible things started happening to me in accordance with what I needed to evolve. I became much more visibly, loudly alive.

I started sharing my journey on my blog and to my honest surprise (I had heard of this happening before to other people, and yes, I understand that the interweb is a “worldwide” thing—but on some level I really didn't expect it to happen to me), folks from all over the globe started writing to me and telling me that the path I sketched was helping them too. This blew my mind not a little bit. So—humbled, mind blown—I offer you the whole journey here in this book.

Love,
Carolyn

INTRODUCTION

Entering the Mythic Journey and Making Your Soul

When students would show up in the Reading Poetry class that I taught for years at the University of Pittsburgh, they'd usually be taken aback to discover that I think the only reason to read poetry is to become a poet in the fullest, most sacred sense of that term—a sense that's been largely forgotten, both by contemporary academia and by modern publishing poets.

I would explain to my class that real poetry is the side effect of *poïesis*. In ancient Greek, *poïesis* meant “making.” What is made in *poïesis*? The soul. What is the process of *poïesis*? It has various names, but in the Western tradition it's been widely known as alchemy. This alchemy is a deep work of collective and personal transformation and evolution. It is the mysterious union of the conscious with the unconscious, of the pure witnessing faculty of the mind (Shiva) with the electric energy of the subtle body and heart (Shakti). It's the way that genius stops being a source of suffering and becomes a source of joy.

I tell my class that anything anywhere that we have, any painting or piece of writing or house or garment or nation that was made by a person or group of people who used the occasion of making it as a chance to imaginatively work out evolution, collective or personal, *is* poetry. It is alive; it has a restless, provoking energy, a soul of its own. Looking on it, enjoying it, teaching it, reading it, hearing it, living in it can stimulate our own souls and launch us further on our own

alchemical trip. The result of successful alchemy in any human life is abiding, grounded, ecstatic bliss; creative potency; and joy.

For my startled students, it would take a while for it to sink in that I was really talking seriously about all this crazy stuff—alchemy, genius, electric energy, ecstatic bliss, and, worst of all, *the soul*! They'd at first be disturbed to understand that our course was not devoted to parsing iambs from dactyls but to becoming a poet in the highest, deepest, most radical way. That is, it was a course in becoming one who makes manifest the soul in himself, in others, and in the world—a course in becoming a person fully alive in the expression of her genius, fully joyful and illuminated with strength.

Gradually, as the weeks passed and they discovered that I was really willing to support them on this undertaking, they would become restless with excitement. They'd be able to follow me when I suggest that they don't need to believe in or prove this notion of soul in order to participate in it—they would get it that soul is itself a poetic theory, an enabling fiction, something created. That which creates is that which is created. Should this surprise us?

All this strangeness is predicated on certain premises I hold:

1. The only reason to read or write poetry at all is to be helped on your own trip toward becoming a poet in this strong sense.
2. A poet is not an insipid person who writes nice verses in the company of polite professors and gets them published to widespread approval in pretentious magazines.
3. A poet is a soulmaker. She's a dynamic force that radically changes the movement of thought and imagination within her generation. A real poet is a shaman and a healer, a warrior and a scientist, a philosopher and a living dream. She might write some verses or she might not. The verses might be published or they might not. This has exactly no consequence or bearing for the poet's actual purpose and mission, which is to bring soul into the world, by whatever means available and necessary.

It was presumptuous of me to assume that students who signed up for a course in reading poetry wanted to do this weird business of becoming

a poet in the most profound sense—after all, reading poetry sounds like a nice, easy, fireside activity. But becoming a true poet, a lucid dreamer in this life—that is not easy, and that is not safe at all.

It's vital, intimate, demanding, and thrilling work. It's an adventure into the depths of the unconscious, into the life force of the body. It's a descent into the underworld whose outcome is uncertain.

I operated on the faith that anyone who wandered into my classroom was there by virtue of a synchronous alignment and was actually a dreamer ready to pop. In my years of teaching, I found that I was very largely right. My students came to me stressed out, hung up, disaffected, sick with worry, cynical, stifled, and depressed in a thousand ways. Half of them didn't think they were creative or imaginative at all and heavily doubted that anything we could do together would change that.

Yet after a semester together I would see the overwhelming majority of my students blossom into poets of real and dazzling power—people capable of stirring and expressing the deepest levels of imagination in themselves and others. They became relaxed, confident, capable. They became truly responsible, in that they learned to be responsive to their own soul.

My basic insight as a teacher was to recognize that there's no use in anyone reading the written stuff called poetry or attempting to write it unless that someone is herself on a journey of poetic evolution, a journey to become a soulmaker and to stop suffering.

To start students on this conscious evolution, I invited them to participate in a course of adventure that I already mentioned. It's the one that the famous mythographer Joseph Campbell observed as the underlying movement in all myth and folktale. This adventure is widely known as "the hero's journey," but as I use it, I prefer to call it "the mythic journey," both to denote the lack of gender specificity of the process and to allow for the adjustments and elaborations I extend out of Campbell's work.

When we consciously, deliberately enter the mythic journey, we begin the work of joining our conscious with our unconscious, and so we become much more alive to symbol and metaphor, allusion and story, character and drama—all this stuff is the stuff of dreams, and it is also the stuff of poetry and myth.

The mythic journey is a labor of answering our heart's call to evolve

by deliberately engaging with and taking on the challenges offered by our own unconscious.

It stirs up stunning synchronicities, omens, and mysterious forces in our lives. It is a symbolic and imaginative process but not “merely” so—because as we do it, we find the symbols and the imaginations we meet in our fantasies and dreams becoming living realities outside of us.

What Happens Once You Start This Journey

When we dreamers start to adventure into unknown and magical territory, we become *hungry* for the poetry of others, wanting guidance and confirmation that the path we’re walking can be navigated.

We also become *eager* to create poetry—in verse or in action. If we’re not actively traveling this path, the poetry of others and the poetry that we ourselves generate is dull and irrelevant. Furthermore, we suffer.

What I teach is a process of becoming a soulmaker. Soulmaking, as John Keats noted, is the work of creating our unique bliss. In this process, we liberate our creativity and our joy, our power and our purpose. We become imaginatively rich and spiritually vibrant.

The interesting thing about soulmaking is that everyone craves it—an enlarged imaginative perception of themselves and the world, a deeper emotional connection to their own hearts and to the hearts of others, a wilder capacity for joy—and yet we have almost no societally sanctioned space for this endeavor.

Soulmaking is the rightful province of humanities education, as the depth psychologist James Hillman pointed out—yet in the present-day scrupulously secular academy, the word “soul” creates a scandal. Depth psychology itself makes room for it—but how many people have access to their very own archetypal analyst? In my work as a teacher, I brought soulmaking back to the secular humanities classroom—and in the present work, I offer soulmaking to the world at large.

I’ve taught dreamers of all stripes—budding neuroscientists, engineers, writers, medical doctors, philosophers, historians, linguists, and mathematicians—and people who had no notion what they wanted to do. I’ve seen orthodox religious students undergo ecstatic Whitmanesque

spiritual awakenings, stoic premeds unleash tearful emotional breakthroughs, and business-marketing majors write poems that made me feel as if the top of my head had blown off.

I've come to understand: *No matter who you are or what you do, if you're drawn to the dreamy side of life and you long to create a better world, you have genius within you that demands to be brought forth. It is not too weird, too useless, or too fluffy to go about the labor of transmuting your suffering to ecstasy.*

Through my own work and that of my students I've come to see that the soul will have its way with us, whether we will it or not. Our resistances to the process of undergoing deep adventure are just our fear and clinging to the surface stabilities of life.

If you're clinging to the surface, if you're afraid and tired and empty and see no lightning bolts of passion in your life, it is possible that you can liberate yourself and those around you by taking up the tools and processes this book offers.

This world, as the poet John Keats told us, is *not* a vale of tears. It's a vale of soulmaking: a place to flame the little sparks of divinity that we are into roaring fires capable of our own unique bliss. Keats suggested that we make our souls by learning to read the terrors of the world through the expansive wisdom of our hearts. This process is an inevitable one—it can happen very slowly, over a million lifetimes, or it can happen right now, in this one, if the work is undertaken.

The Gift World as the Point of Creativity

It helps me and the magic people I work with to imagine that the point of doing soulmaking creative work is to realize the gift world, or heaven on earth, for ourselves and for everyone else.

What is the gift world? It's a subjective experience of life in which your genius is fully supported and welcomed in its expression, and in which your needs and authentic preferences are joyously met by a provident universe.

Interestingly, the subjective experience of the gift world is brought about when you put your creative power to work in the project of fully

supporting the genius of yourself and others through undertaking the mythic journey, and when you seek to joyously fulfill the preferences of others in a manner that delights you.

So the gift world is a bit of a paradox. It's a subjective experience of life that comes about in part through your making it objectively real for others via your offering of your gifts. No one can be forced to enter the experience of the gift world, since participation in it requires deliberate action, but everyone can be invited to it via generosity, kindness, and the sense of sublime wonder (i.e., awesomeness) that our genius manifests through her work. Another way of thinking about the gift world is that it's a world that is completely ensouled, a world where connection, love, warmth, and joy are everyone's dominant experiences.

This idea that the gift world is the real point of all creative work gelled for me when I read on the American Visionary Art Museum's website that the most common theme of visionary art (i.e., cool stuff produced not by trained artists but by people with a driving need to communicate something from within) is the "backyard recreation of the Garden of Eden and other utopian visions—quite literally building heaven on earth."

When I learned this, I began to suspect that the reason why my creative conflagration sometimes sputtered was not because I've ever been blocked or because I had a uniquely wicked childhood but rather because I had mistakenly imagined that the purpose of creative work was to entertain or impress, when really its purpose is to make heaven manifest on earth.

I realized I'd been playing small—and yes, by playing small I mean aiming to get on the best-seller list or win a Pulitzer. Such goals are dry and dull, because they're structurally part of the rather lame universe we habitually participate in—the one where struggle and competition are normal, where some folks win big while others lose, where some get to be glamorous artists and authors and others are confined to drudgery.

Why I'm Not Really into "Art"

I realized that the reason I'm completely uninterested in most work

produced self-consciously as “art” is that such work tends to configure itself in a manner that aims to be legible within the present system—the mad world. As such, even if it offers to communicate high ideals, it leaves me rather cold, because such ideals are betrayed by the very fact that the work presents itself as a cultural commodity rather than a pure gift.

Too often, this kind of work lacks an essential generosity—it offers itself for the sake of being seen and admired rather than for the sake of giving forth love and power to its receiver.

I reflect, for example, that one of my most favorite poets, Rumi, gave his poems out wildly and freely.

Creative work is most inspiring and most exciting when it offers to freely lead us toward the realization of our best possibilities. I suggest that if you’ve ever felt in any way creatively underrealized or blocked, perhaps the source of your discomfort is that you’ve sought to make something that we will recognize as valuable “art” within our present condition rather than seeking to make or do things that call both you and us to our gift nature, our genius—a state where we are empowered, expanding, free, realized.

On Awesoming Your Life

“Awesome Your Life” is the name of my blog and also a catchy synonym for awakening your genius. I consider awesoming your life to be a process of undertaking both daily life and the mythic journey with a commitment to practicing spiritual principles at every step of the way. This means cultivating profound honesty, simple innocence, and intense optimism in both my daily life and my adventures in the dreamworld. I find that awesoming my life is something that I need to give care and attention to each day. It’s not something that I ever do perfectly, and it’s not a project that will ever be finished. I don’t get to wake up one morning and say, “Done! Life is awesomed. Genius awake. Soul is made. Check! Time for something else now—perhaps the brutal takeover of a small developing country?”

Instead, I get to wake up each day in a life that is gaining

progressively more awesome steam and swivel my way through the fog, guided only by my genius and the principles I've just mentioned. Each day I need to find ways to apply those principles in concrete ways, and each day I need to help others to awesome their lives too, and to let others help me. Otherwise, the awesomeness steam dissipates and my life gradually halts and eventually rolls backward into the realm of total suck.

How do I know this? Because I have let my life roll back into suck on many occasions. Things got good and I decided hey, I don't really need to be *completely* honest with myself and others! Rapidly following upon this decision, my shiny innocence rusts into a crispy cynical shell; I become overwhelmed by self-centered fear, and all that throbbing optimism turns into beady-eyed paranoia. *Help others?* Fool! Can't you see I've got *things to do*? The whole world is against me! I have to compete—compete and win or else be annihilated!

What Happens When I Go Backward?

The really interesting thing about such a backward roll into crazyland is that my compromised self-honesty makes it nearly impossible for me to realize on my own that it's happening until I hit such a stark, hard low that the thud of my landing jars me into clarity, or until someone who loves me tells me all about myself. Happily, over some years of practicing these principles (in a highly imperfect fashion), I've let enough people love me that nowadays I get told all about myself before I get the distinct displeasure of having to hit a hard low.

What does it sound like when someone I love tells me all about myself? Well, usually I'll say something that evidences in a neat fashion that I've been taken over by self-centered fear. Something like, "I hate my life—everything is too hard, nothing I do satisfies anyone, and I can't stand those people." The person who loves me will then look at me with compassion, gently point out that actually *I'm* the one making everything too hard for myself, the one who's never satisfied, and also the one whom I can't stand—and then, my loving friend will ask what I intend to do to change that. Ugh. Something in my solar plexus burns; I

feel a little queasy. They're right—they're telling me the truth I've been avoiding. The problem with my life isn't that the world is against me, it's that *I'm* against me—and by extension, I'm against the world.

I don't know what it is about me that caused my default setting to become “hateful, self-pitying fear gremlin.” Probably the manifold shortcomings of my parents coupled with the ills of society, compounded by my innate sensitivity and genius, and also the innate sensitivity and genius of my parents and of society, compounded by my manifold shortcomings and ills.

What I mean to say is that there's no one to single out to blame for the fact that my life can readily, vigorously slide into suck—and also that qualities that make us wonderful as human beings individually and collectively can also make us miserable and dangerous when not used in the service of spiritual principles.

How Long Does It Take for Something Rad to Happen?

It's my experience that after several months of consistently applying the principles of this book in my life in a focused way, I have some form of major breakthrough: my life awesomes up in a manner that totally tickles me. After some months of plodgering (“plodgering” is a word I've coined; it combines plodding, slogging, and soldiering, and I intend it to connote how it feels to be marching day by day in the midst of an uncomfortable and highly unglamorous process of change, all the while doing battle with the elements in myself that would prefer I stay stuck) and leaplighting (this is another one of my portmanteaus, intended to connote how it feels to be tumble-skipping day by day in the midst of a thrilling and highly humorous process of change—which is exactly identical with the uncomfortable and unglamorous one), the awesoming up breakthrough usually occurs in a fashion that's totally ridiculous and utterly magical.

And man, I mean *magical*. Like Disney cartoon shower of fairy bubble glitter stardust magical. If the very idea of your life awesoming up in a

spectacular Disneyesque fashion makes you suspicious, bristly, and profoundly tempted to ignore me—*great!* That makes you just like all of my best friends!

Because I love my best friends—and, reader, I love you!—I am going to persist in telling you all about soulmaking and the grand things that can therein result, because I really can't stand the thought of you continuing to squander your genius on those French puns and clown suits.

KEY CONCEPTS

What Makes Awakening Possible

Some people are very uncomfortable with the word “soul.” To them, it conjures up connotations of dogmatic religious doctrine—souls damned or souls saved, tortured or redeemed. But I’m not talking about the soul in any dogmatic sense. I’m talking about the soul as an energetic reality.

Morphic Fields

It’s my understanding that the energy traditionally and poetically known as the soul corresponds to the phenomenon that biologist Rupert Sheldrake called the morphic field (“morphic” comes from the Greek word for “form,” *morphe*—so a morphic field is a field that creates form, an organizing field).

Sheldrake first developed his theory of morphic fields as a means of answering a huge problem faced by biologists: how do organisms take on their particular forms? Most of us who aren’t biologists assume that the discovery of the DNA molecule resolved this question—but biologists know it didn’t. The mystery of how organisms take on their specific shapes remains unsolved and unaccounted for by DNA. DNA tells organisms what type of cells to form—but it doesn’t tell those cells what shapes to take. The DNA and cells are the same in our arms and our legs, yet our legs and arms don’t have the same shape. So what tells a leg to form into a leg and an arm to form into an arm?

Sheldrake posited that everything has a morphic field surrounding it,

and that the field tells it how to form into whatever sort of thing it's meant to be—a human, a fern, a bacterium, a crystal. There are many levels and many kinds of fields. Each general thing has its own distinctive field, but so does each individual within that category of thing. So there's a morphic field for the human species, but there's also a morphic field for each individual human.

These fields are stable in the sense that they run on memory—for example, the field of a species will produce new members of the species based upon the collective memory of form lodged in that species' field. Yet these fields are not static. They're intelligent and responsive. They can alter, evolve, and expand when new information comes into the species' field as individual members of that species learn new skills.

Morphic Resonance

Morphic fields accomplish this spread of positive innovation through the principle of morphic resonance. Morphic resonance just means that like influences like. So if the morphic field of one individual resembles the morphic field of another individual, then those two fields will be able to influence and act upon each other, even at great distance, because morphic resonance is nonlocal. So if I'm a monkey and I do all the hard work of being the first monkey ever to learn to play the guitar, I've created an innovation in the energy patterns of my individual morphic field. I've changed my field through the introduction of new information (my mad guitar-playing skills). If you're a monkey on the other side of the world, it will now be easier for you to learn to play the guitar, because your individual monkey field will be influenced by the innovation in my individual monkey field through morphic resonance. This influencing happens because our morphic fields have a similar shape to begin with, since we're both monkeys. So we see that morphic resonance is the means by which morphic fields act upon one another and communicate information.

Yet it's not just similarity of physical shape that can make individuals capable of influencing one another through morphic resonance—it's also similarity of behavior or action. For example, in religious rituals,

participants perform actions that have been performed over thousands of years by other believers in the same tradition. Through their ritual action, participants thus connect themselves via morphic resonance with the larger morphic field of the religion built up over time, and they thereby gain intuitive access to the knowledge and wisdom stored within that field.

It's important to understand that morphic fields are creative. They create based out of habitually ingrained patterns, patterns that have become so habitual that they're unconscious. This means that a field will continue to produce the same results unless new innovation, new information is introduced into it.

So what does this mean for you?

The Care and Keeping of Your Morphic Field

There are levels of your morphic field that unconsciously create certain things about you that might be damn hard to change and that you probably wouldn't want to alter anyway—say, the level of biological organization that tells your fingernails how to shape into human fingernails. Your field has learned over eons of evolution just how to make those fingernails—and they're great. The shape of your fingernails is a deep habit in your field that maybe you don't need to change.

But there are other levels of the field that organizes you that perhaps you do want to change—say, for example, the field that organizes your consciousness, your perception of the world. It's a new-age truism that your consciousness creates your reality. I would offer that it's actually more accurate to say that your morphic field (or soul) creates your consciousness, which then creates your experience of reality. It's actually not possible to work directly on raising your consciousness, since consciousness is not a “thing” in itself but an effect organized by the morphic field. But it *is* possible to work on your morphic field, your fabric of unconscious memory, also known as your karmic traces, which will then alter your consciousness.

The way to work on your morphic field is to introduce innovative information to it. Alas, this is not a quick and easy process. The

innovation has to strike deep for the field to be able to creatively act upon it—the innovation itself needs to become a habit, since the field creates unconsciously, out of habit. This is why self-realization is not a one-day project. This is why we need to do our spiritual practices (more about those to come) every day. We do it to ingrain new habits and thereby alter our field at its basic, unconscious level, so it will produce for us new creative results in our consciousness and thereby in our life.

The Fast Way to a Powerfully Positive Morphic Field

Happily, though, there is a shortcut. We can speed up the work of making our souls by deliberately practicing actions that align us with the morphic resonance of the mythic journey. The mythic journey is an ingrained pattern in the morphic field of the human species. It pervades every culture and every time. In effect, the journey is a series of rituals.

But the rituals of the mythic path are not the rituals of the large group, meant to affirm the regular processes of communal life. These are the mystery rituals of the solitary adventurer, of one who steps out of the social order so that she can bring back a new truth that will change everything and everyone. In other words, these are the rituals not of stability but of evolution.

When we consciously undertake participation in the actions of the mythic journey (answering the heart's call, accepting the heart's call, meeting our guide, undergoing trials in the dreamworld, etc.), we connect our individual morphic field to the fields of all those who have preceded us in this great work.

We begin to resonate with heroes and heroines across time and to gain intuitive access to their knowledge and experience. This resonance makes it exponentially easier for us to achieve our own transmutation. In one sense, though the individual genius we find and eventually live is uniquely ours, we might say that it's also the collective treasury of truth forged by those who dared to step outside the bounds of conventional social life and into the dark forest of the soul's interior, a treasury whose

riches we claim when we walk the same wild path and embody its resonance.

So we can alter our morphic field through changing the thoughts, feelings, memories, and experiences that we practice—through rewriting the information in the field. When we've changed the images in our field, the field then works on us, on our consciousness, and on our experience, altering the way we perceive ourselves and the world.

I call this work of putting new images into our field and changing our morphic field for the better the work of soulmaking. The more we evolve our own fields through soulmaking, the more sensitively we can perceive and interact with the morphic fields (souls) of others. We become both highly receptive and highly influential.

What Does All This Have to Do with Genius?

As we dreamers make our souls into evolved fields, our genius is nurtured and our presence and everything we create becomes charged and capable of positively altering the fields of others. In this process, we become more essentially human—which is to say, paradoxically, more divine. As we become more essentially human, our field gains greater influence over other humans through morphic resonance, because like affects like. We are able to affect others at a deeper level, because we have become more active on the deeper level ourselves. This is what it means to be a great poet, a great maker.

We change our souls by using the power of our imaginations and actions. As we do this, our imagination becomes less the agent of our will and more the organ of a visionary perception. We become able to see and commune with the souls/morphic fields of plants, animals, other people, groups, gods. We become able to detect what Emerson called “the metamorphosis”—the spiritual flow of relationship, thought, and evolution moving around and underneath the whole world of manifest form.

The soulmaker poet is able to see the dance of spiritual forms that underlies and pervades all physical form. Because the poet has this spiritual perception, her mind is not stuck in the literal and the material.

She can see the flow, the relationships, the energies, and ideas underlying all things. Because she can see these relationships, she can see the meaning of things, because nothing has meaning outside of its relationships. The poet is then able to express and communicate this astounding perception of the underlying flow to others through her use of language, action, presence, and everything else.

To make our soul means first to come to understand that our soul, our field, is the source of everything we are, that our material fate is determined by it. We can then shift our focus from trying to control or resist external reality and instead focus on enlarging and purifying the images, feelings, memories, and thoughts that shape our soul/field.

As the images, feelings, and memories of our soul change, the soul then acts upon us and alters the form of our being. The soul evolves our spiritual organs (also known as chakras), making us capable of visionary perception and beneficial influence upon the souls of others.

First we shape our souls through our deliberate choice of new thoughts, feelings, memories, experiences—through our spiritual practice and our decision to undergo the mythic journey. Then our soul, thus nurtured, takes over and works on us. It changes our perception, our circumstances, our abilities. It evolves us and makes us capable of evolving others.

In an important sense, our souls don't belong merely to the physical bodies we currently inhabit. The field of energy, knowledge, and feeling that we shape during this lifetime will continue after this body and this local personality have dissolved. Our souls are magnetic fields of organizing possibility.

After this body fades, the magnetic energy field we've created in our souls will go on to call forth a new body and a new personality, this time differently shaped, based on what we have succeeded in bringing into the field. Furthermore, because what we make of our own field affects the collective field, the collective soul of humanity benefits from our growth.

YOUR TOOLS

Technologies for Waking Your Genius

The following tools that I present, metta cultivation and the commonplace book, are the basic practices that help to evolve the resonance of your personal morphic field and to transmute the suffering that genius can cause into joy.

Metta Cultivation

Metta means “fat with friendship” in Pali, the language in which Gautama Buddha historically taught. It’s often translated as “loving-kindness.” It connotes a condition of being infinitely appreciative and warm without grasping or possessing. It’s also a state of mind that’s considered to be one of the four brahmaviharas, or Divine Realms (the other ones are compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity). Metta is a Divine Realm because it’s boundless and beautiful. Unlike possessive romantic love, it can be expanded to include everyone and everything that exists.

Metta cultivation is a traditional Buddhist practice, but you don’t need to be Buddhist to do it, just willing to extend love. In metta cultivation, you wish well for others, and you take time to vividly imagine them enjoying the happiness and well-being that you wish for them.

I notice that when I practice this form of vivid imagination, both for people in my real life and for the characters who inhabit my dreamworld, it gives me a big energetic boost and enhances my awareness of my connectedness to all other people. It's one of the most effective and reliable means of becoming ecstatically joyful that I've yet found.

When I vividly imagine another person feeling happy, loved, totally fulfilled—sometimes *especially* if I don't like that person or have a grudge against them—I feel the happiness and love that I'm imagining on their behalf.

This clues me in that my happiness really isn't separate from theirs. It's all one big field, available to be shared. As I practice this, it gradually dawns on me that my soul is one with the divine soul of the world.

How to Practice Metta Cultivation

I like to practice metta cultivation in rounds of four. I visualize for a friend, for someone I feel so-so about, for someone who rubs me the wrong way, and then for myself. I recommend devoting about five minutes to each person, so that your meditation takes a total of twenty minutes. I don't recommend stretching it out for any longer than that, because this kind of meditation is extremely cleansing and energizing for the heart chakra—if you push it, you might end up buzzing so hard you'll be shaking or unable to sleep. If twenty minutes of this meditation causes those symptoms of overexcitement in you, reduce your practice to ten minutes—visualizing just on behalf of someone you don't care for very much and for yourself. Now, with that caution, here are the details of the meditation spelled out, step by step:

1. Find some place to be relatively alone and relaxed.
2. Take a few deep breaths and center yourself in the intention to extend your love and drop your grievances.
3. Bring to mind a friend.

4. Imagine that person in a place where they're tremendously happy, doing what they most love. This might be fairly easy, since you've enjoyed happy times with your friend in the past and have a sense of what lights him up. Don't just stop at imagining your friend superficially cheerful though. Try to go deep. See and feel what it would be like for your friend to be completely free from misery, fear, doubt, worry—for your friend to be totally liberated, centered, calm, and joyful.
5. After you've done this for a few moments for a friend of yours, bring to mind someone who's not your friend but not an enemy either. Someone you feel so-so about. Like, "Yeah, that person exists, whatever, that's cool." Now do the same thing for that person that you did for your friend—practice seeing and feeling her in state of utter freedom and delight.
6. Now bring to mind someone you're irritated with or repulsed by—a friend, a colleague, a character from a dream or fantasy—and imagine *that* person in a place where they're buzzing with joy and contentment. A little bit difficult, isn't it? This can be tough if you don't know the person all that well or you've never seen them really happy. Nonetheless, make something up.
7. Finally, bring to mind the one person who you most likely feel the most ambivalence about: yourself. See yourself from the outside (imagine seeing your own face and body). Look at yourself and see yourself in a state of 100-percent-perfect, high-grade ecstasy. Ecstasy like the kind you can't buy from even the best drug dealer. The kind of ecstasy that only comes from genuine and uninterrupted contact with the love energy of the universe. See yourself feeling no doubt, no worry, no fear. See yourself accepting every last facet of your life—past, present, and future with total ease. Imagine yourself talking to other people and moving about in the world in this state of completely grounded, completely sane love-bliss.

Example Visualization

See your snarky colleague who likes to bake standing in the midst of a totally gorgeous kitchen with glossy blue walls and a high stamped-tin ceiling: she has graceful cake plates stacked with luscious cupcakes all around her; her heart is full with joy and peace; she's stirring a bowl of golden batter; she's surrounded by people she loves who are sharing in her bounty. She's radiant; her face is beaming. The room smells like Swiss cocoa and cinnamon. Someone makes a joke and the happy baker bursts out with a delighted, full-bodied laugh.

This visualization might take some work to come up with, because you usually encounter your colleague looking bored across the table from you at meetings, quibbling with your ideas, rushing past you in the hallways. Nonetheless—persevere in imagining her exuding complete love and pleasure.

The Benefits of Metta Cultivation

Metta cultivation is a means of altering your morphic resonance so that you are vibrating in a range where you can be most easily influenced and affected by love and loving people. The fact that metta cultivation alters our experience of loving resonance has been documented by contemporary science, and these scientific studies have been brilliantly commented upon recently by Barbara Frederickson in her book *Love 2.0: How Our Supreme Emotion Affects Everything We Think, Do, and Become*. I highly recommend Frederickson's book for a more in-depth examination of the science of metta and resonance.

Our present concern is how to use metta to awaken our genius. For that, we need to keep in mind that with morphic fields, there's a law at work. Some metaphysical teachers call it the "law of attraction." Sheldrake called it the "law of influence," and I find that a more helpful way of thinking about it, since any attraction that happens is actually a side effect of influence. Allow me to explain.

You see, it's not so much that like *attracts* like but rather that like and like are arranged by the same overarching field. For example, think about the proverb "birds of a feather flock together." That little bit of insight is frequently cited by the teachers Abraham-Hicks as a means of

explaining “the law of attraction.” But if you think about it, it’s not exactly that the individual birds “attract” each other, but rather that the birds, by virtue of being similar, attract the same organizing field. The field that organizes birds into flying flocks has its own purposes, designs, and wisdom that exceed that of any individual bird. The field puts the birds into a specific configuration and gets them to fly certain places at certain times of the year. It has a knowledge and an intelligence that each little bird lacks on its own.

More on Metta Cultivation, the Law of Influence, and Morphic Resonance

Humans are unique among creatures, because we can exert some choice over what overarching field we choose to align with. We can choose what we make ourselves similar to and thereby choose what larger morphic field will affect us. The momentum of habit is strong. Morphic fields have memories, and they will continue to create us and our situation in life according to the patterns already imprinted within them, unless we make a deliberate effort to imprint a new pattern.

This choice of what pattern we decide to imprint upon ourselves remains completely unacknowledged and unexercised by most people. Yet if you’re reading this now, you’re aware enough to make a conscious choice about what qualities you align yourself with and therefore what overarching morphic field will organize the shape of your life.

I want to emphasize here that we don’t have precise control over what the morphic field we align with brings to us. The fields that organize humans, like the fields that organize birds into flocks, have patterns and wisdoms that belong to the field rather than to individuals within it. The field we align with will organize our lives in the way *it* wants, not in the way we personally think we want. This can be okay though—in fact, much more than okay—if we deliberately align ourselves with the resonance of the field of loving-kindness.

Through metta cultivation, we align ourselves with that field of love. By deliberately, repeatedly putting energy into imagining people we

know and our own sweet selves in states of ecstatic happiness and freedom, we alter the resonance of our personal morphic field. In this alteration, we remove ourselves from the organizing fields of resentment, envy, hate, anxiety, stuckness, boredom. These emotions and the situations they generate become much less able to affect us.

Another way of saying this is that we move into the unconditional love level of consciousness, something that Ken Keyes Jr. wrote about excellently in *The Handbook to Higher Consciousness*. Because we are being organized and acted upon predominantly by the energy of love when practicing metta cultivation, we become much more able to see what is lovable in others and in ourselves. We gradually are much less hard on everybody (including ourselves). As we become less critical and demanding, we trigger the criticizing, demanding, fearful patterns of other people much less, and those others get to have a much easier time loving *us*. We gradually start to feel much lighter, more content, and more supported in our daily lives. We like ourselves more, and we can see that we have an uplifting, energizing effect on the people around us.

Also, since the law of influence states that like influences like, we become more capable of influencing and relating with other people who are loving and generous. We become capable of influencing the hearts of others, because we ourselves are living in our hearts. This is a great power that needs to be carefully respected. It's important that we never attempt to use our heart power for our own selfish gain, or else we'll move ourselves right out of the field of love and into greed and manipulation.

Furthermore, metta cultivation has a way of making us more intuitive, more perceptive, more readily able to access ideas that will be meaningful and beneficial to others (because guess what—those ideas hang out in the morphic field of love).

When love is acting upon us and organizing us, all of life goes easier. We don't get upset as frequently. The field moves us toward other beings who are also loving and generously wishing the best for others.

Most interesting to me—because I'm obsessed with bringing ecstasy to myself and to the whole world—the more loving we become, the more we become capable of ecstasy. It turns out that ecstatic joy is a flower of love—it's the feeling of love moving inexorably through us and out to touch others.

Example Scenario

Let's think of this in specific terms. Bring to mind your snarky colleague again. Know that to invest your time imagining her gloriously happy and fulfilled is a real act of generosity on your part. Since all of us human beings are connected, your kind vision for your colleague actually has the effect of improving the probabilities in the field directly surrounding her. The altered condition of the field can then draw forth *from her* new manifestations of joy.

So while practicing this metta cultivation for your colleague, you'll immediately start to feel more of your own love and generosity—which feels great!—and you'll also be *actually* helping her realize her own best potentials. Even if you begin from a place of resentment or irritation, you'll discover after a while that you *really would* like to see this person being completely fulfilled and relaxed. Just realizing this brings you to some important knowledge: you're a kind person who can take real pleasure in the happiness of others.

You'll also start to feel happier and lighter yourself. It's impossible to vividly imagine anyone feeling really great without you also starting to feel fantastic. You've not just improved the field surrounding your colleague—you've improved the whole field surrounding you.

You may notice that after doing this meditation you feel more alert, more interested in your life, more inclined to do things, more glad to listen closely to other people when they talk.

The next time you see your colleague after you've practiced the metta cultivation on her behalf, you'll feel more inclined to be soft toward her and less inclined to judge her.

You'll sympathize with her own best wishes for herself, and you'll be able to intuitively grasp how her irritating actions (quibbling, rushing) are part of her means of coping with life's difficulties and defending her tenuous sense of self. You'll see she can't help it. You'll feel more compassionate and interested in helping her.

We human beings are all extremely perceptive. Because we're connected by the field, we can feel when someone genuinely wishes well for us, and we respond to this positively.

Over time, your colleague will pick up on your altered resonance.

She'll notice that you don't put out vibes of irritation or disapproval when she brushes by you. She'll be able to relax more when she's in your presence. She might ask you how you're doing. She might support one of your ideas brought up at a meeting.

One day she might bring you some rad cinnamon cupcakes with cocoa-custard icing, and then you'll know the magic is really working.

The Common-Place Book

The common-place book is a technology for consciousness evolution. It's a big blank book where we collect and process all the imaginative energies and insights that come to us as we move through our soulmaking trip. In the common-place book, we collect everything that affects us as we experience our adventure, and we work with it. It's called a common-place book because it's a book that creates a common place for all of the disparate and sometimes seemingly disjointed stuff that's going on with us to be brought into community and dialogue. When we gather our dreams and our experiments and our journal entries and quotations from works that inspire us all together in one place, we create a concentrated sacred ground where we work out what we need to work out.

We might copy out whole poems or passages from books that appeal to us into our common-place book. We might write journal entries about our experiences with rapidly increasing synchronicity. We might cut out pictures from magazines or newspapers that appeal to us and paste them inside.

Metta cultivation is a spiritual practice that enriches our body-mind's ability to flow in ecstatic bliss. The creation and working of a common-place book is a complementary soul practice that cultivates our imagination.

More Than a Record of Thought

A common-place book is more than a notebook and more than a journal. It's a space for the cross-fertilization of dream and intellect, image and insight.

The common-place book isn't a diary. It's a treasury of highlights from one's life and one's readings that one wishes to remember for later reflection and stimulation. In our common-place book, we keep quotations from books that strike us as profound or important; we keep descriptions of our nighttime dreams and of realizations that strike us as we go about our days.

Yet the common-place book is not just a space for these initial recordings. It's also a place for the development, amplification, and extension of those highlights. That is to say, one must make a weekly habit of reading over his own common-place book and allowing the contents—notes from readings, journal entries, dream recollections, records of experiments, moments of reverie, bits of verse—to be seen and thought over again. All the note-taking and recording in the world is useless without this habit of review. We review our common-place book, and as we review we make notes to ourselves in the margins. We start writing elaborations and commentaries and plans on fresh pages; we revise and augment our original notions.

Just the act of recording a highlight can have the effect of etching it more fully into our being than it would otherwise be if we just let it float by. Every act of recording is simultaneously its own occasion of formulation and reflection. We have to choose how to relate to ourselves the narrative of a dream, the startle of a realization as we write it down. This initial selection and narration form the beginning of taking something we've discovered deeper into ourselves.

If we fail to record our highlights to begin with, they're not quite lost to us—the more important they are, the more they'll just recur to us again and again in various configurations until we stand up and pay sufficient attention. The work of recording our highlights greatly facilitates our evolution, however. Because if we record our fleeting dreams and inspirations, realizations and words of others that struck us deeply, then we don't need to wait to dream similar dreams, be struck again by the same insight, or reread the same book in order to assimilate those images and ideas. Instead, we can get down to the business of processing what we've found much more quickly. We can revisit and

recollect, churn and reconsider the highlights of our process at will.

Unless we record our highlights as they occur, they slip right by us and are very rapidly forgotten. It's possible to realize something crucial and then to quickly forget it because something urgent comes up on the surface of our lives—we lose our wallets or need to prepare for a big presentation—and in our stress and hurry, we lose sight of the illumination that was beginning to germinate within us. A commonplace book is a technology of resistance against getting lost on the urgent surface of life. It is a means of fertilizing and tending the depths.

Highlights and Shadows

If we don't review our highlights and develop their depths and shadows, our recording is rendered half-impotent. Though the initial act of recording is itself a reflection and condensation that furthers our growth, often the larger import of our highlights can only become apparent to us as we see them stacked upon each other.

As we look over a collection of our highlights from a past week or month, we can see patterns emerging. This pattern recognition is of utmost importance. As we read over our commonplace books, we can notice what themes have obsessed us in our reading, what scenarios recur in our dreams, what truths our experiments in imagination drive us to acknowledge.

Yet the review movement of engaging with our commonplace books is not limited to just reading over. We must also pay attention to the thoughts and ideas that occur to us as we read. Often something new will have constellated in us since the time of our initial recording of the highlight, and this new constellation will demand to be synthesized with the old.

In rereading what we've written, we allow the highlights to shine again in our minds, but this time we pay close attention to the shadows that they cast—the arguments or amendments, the doubts or elaborations—and we write these down too.

Synthesis

In the intersection of highlight and shadow, we come to fresh realizations. We write paragraphs and sentences that attempt to give voice to our present understanding. We try to define and explain the deep motifs we encounter, as if teaching an audience all about them. In this way, we generate the building blocks for essays and poems, party invitations, incantations, stories, and a thousand other expressions.

How to Use Your Common-Place Book: A Basic Plan

Dream Recall

Each morning, record what you can recollect of your past night's dream and any spontaneous interpretation you have of it. The conscious and deliberate steps that this book guides you to take will create vivid shifts in your internal and external life. It's important to pay attention to your internal landscape at this time by doing your best to remember and record your dreams.

Every night before you go to sleep, as you lie in bed, set the firm intention that you will remember your dreams when you wake up in the morning. As soon as you wake in the morning, gently ask yourself, "What did I dream?" Notice what impressions come to you. Jot them down as quickly as possible, and with as much detail as possible, in your book. Try to describe the scenes and feelings and characters of your dream as richly as you can. The more information you have from your dreams, the better. Don't trust that you'll remember any of it later. The conscious mind rapidly covers over the contents of dreams.

Truth and Beauty Pages

Each morning after writing down what we recall of our dreams, we write at least two pages devoted to Truth and Beauty. This brings the much needed oxygen of consciousness to our experience—thus stoking the flames of genius. There are two ways to go about this:

♦ The Two Questions Meditation

Simply write in response to these questions: “What’s true in my life? And what’s beautiful?” When I do this, I’m more in touch with who I am, with what I need to do, and with what’s going on (that’s the truth part), and I’m more sensitive to the glorious glories all around me (that’s the beauty part).

♦ The Twelve Questions Meditation

This option is a little more in depth. It’s a written inquiry meditation based on a number of sources (The Work of Byron Katie, the Option Method, *The Handbook to Higher Consciousness*). It can take a bit longer than just free-writing. To do the meditation, simply take a pen and paper in hand and slowly ask yourself the following twelve questions. To the best of your ability, allow the answers to arise from your heart rather than from your head. Ask reflectively, seeking to know beyond what you already “know.” Write your answers as they come to you.

1. How do I feel right now that’s less than totally happy, peaceful, and loving (e.g., anxious, sad, angry)?
2. What external condition seems to be provoking or causing that feeling?
3. What do I perceive about that condition? In other words, what do I think that condition means about me, life, the world?
4. Is that perception really real? Can I be certain? Would I bet my life on it?
5. How do I behave when I accept that perception as reality? (What do I say? What do I do? How do I treat other people? How do I feel?)
6. Why do I think I need that perception to be real? How do I think it helps me to see things this way?

7. What would my experience be right now if I had no ability to perceive the condition this way?
8. How would I prefer to feel about this condition?
9. What alternate perception would I need to have about this condition in order to have that preferred feeling?
10. What are some ways in which I already sense this alternate perception to be more real than my initial perception?
11. What beautiful truth, solution, or possibility am I afraid to hope for in this situation, because I think it can't really manifest?
12. What small, simple, fun actions can I take that would be in alignment with the alternate perception and the beautiful possibility?

Why Should We Do Truth and Beauty Pages?

Because when we were little we were taught to perceive ourselves, other people, and the world in a certain way. We were taught by parents, teachers, friends, television, the radio, etc. By and large, we were taught to perceive in a way that would make us unhappy and alienated from our genius. Why? Because such perceptions validate and perpetuate the status quo of separation and competition, the state that the teacher Don Miguel Ruiz has called “the dream of hell” and which I call the mad world.

Those around us may have loved us very much, and yet they still taught us this unhappy and alienating mode of perception, because it was all they themselves knew.

We can become free of the perception that causes unhappiness, but this freedom comes only with persistence, willingness, and attention. We have to question our old perceptions and practice, basing our actions on new ones in order to change our experience and enter the “dream of heaven on earth,” or what I call the gift world.

A daily practice of Truth and Beauty Pages can put us in the habit of questioning the old painful mode of perception and opening up to our new possibilities of love.

Also in the Common-Place Book

Write your responses to this course's exercise and experiments in your common-place book.

Give yourself permission to research random things that catch your interest: figures in your dreams, stuff that your friends post on Facebook, concepts from this course, anything that fires your curiosity.

You know you do this already. You spend hours clicking links and cruising Google and Wikipedia for stuff you want to know. Take your natural research up a notch. When you find something that grabs your sense of wonder, record in your common-place book enough information about its source that you'll be able to access it again (title, author, page number for a book, the address of a website, just the basics—it doesn't have to be a full bibliographic entry, just enough to jog your memory and send you back to where you found it). Then take notes on what you've unearthed. You might engage with multiple and varied sources in this way in a single day.

From one day's exploration, I often end up with all sorts of highlights in my common-place book—notes about the history of New Zealand, passages from the same Emerson essay I've been obsessed with for years, a theory of hermetic cosmogony copied from my friend's blog, recollections of games I played when I was five that I think I'd like to play again.

We all have deep research projects—great questions that drive us to pay attention to the things we pay attention to and read about the things we read about. We may not be conscious of just what this project is or to where it is leading us, and we don't now need to be. We only have to trust that we *do* have a research project, something that our whole being is trying to figure out—and we need to be willing to pay attention to this project and record our progress in it within our common-place book. Whether we're gripped by vintage Japanese anime plots, paintball tactics, Victorian corset construction, or Middle Eastern politics doesn't much matter. We just need to delve deep and attend to our attention. In this way, we'll gain greater insight into the questions that drive us, the dilemmas that confront us, and the images that express us.

STEP ONE

Hearing Your Heart's Call

After a human being has glimpsed the outer orbits of heavenly possibility through any means—whether through falling in love, taking an entheogenic drug, dreaming an astounding dream, or being illuminated in a moment during meditation—that person can no longer peacefully snooze through life. If you're reading this book, I know you've had such a glimpse and that you've been moved to restlessness.

As a dreamer, you're inevitably called to dream yourself awake using the full resources of your imagination and heart. You may have buried or repressed your season of insight, but it happened, and now you are irrevocably changed. The period of fleeting transcendence that we've encountered is a wake-up alarm, a call to adventure. The tremendous beauty of the call is usually followed by a viciously challenging low—the breakup of a romance, the come-down off the drug, the having to get up and go to work after the gorgeous dream, the doldrums of ordinary existence after a flash or stretch of huge realization.

The Sleepwalking Dreamer

This low of coming down from the heights, and the hopelessness that can come with it, can destroy a genius and keep her stuck in an unpleasant state between being fully asleep and fully awake. Following the awakening, it's therefore imperative that the poet find a means of integrating the heaven she's glimpsed with the warp and weft of daily

life. In other words, it's imperative that she make her soul.

There are many forces that conspire against the successful completion of this integration, this making. Dreamers are often told that it flat-out isn't possible to bring heaven to earth. After a dreamer talks to therapists and teachers, parents and even friends about his brushes with the infinite and his desire to enter into a lasting and grounded experience of that bliss, he will likely be told that what he's asking for is far too grand.

"No one lives in ecstasy," a friend once told me. "Your problem is that you want to." On the contrary, I would say that my problem at the time was that I didn't know *how to*. My friend was making the strange and unfounded assumption that I was a being incapable of transcendence and magical transformation. She likely made the same sad and unjustified assumption about herself.

The True Role of the Genius

The role of your genius spirit is to essentially heal, transform, and evolve consciousness. At this fraught time in our planet's history, this role is all the more necessary—consciousness must evolve so that from it we can create what cultural philosopher and writer Charles Eisenstein has accurately and romantically called "the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible." Too often, however, geniuses are encouraged to use their abilities to fulfill predefined roles in existing institutions: artist, teacher, minister, professor. These functions serve the maintenance of the existing society, the existing order of things. Yet the existing order of things is itself greatly disturbed and out of harmony, the product of a level of consciousness that needs raising and healing.

So the dreamer who works to maintain the present order and to succeed within it becomes out of harmony with herself. In this condition, she's a sleepwalker.

A sleepwalker is not quite awake, and neither is she asleep in her bed. She's a being maneuvering simultaneously in dreams and in actuality, in danger of destroying herself and those that surround her as she moves here and there without conscious volition or awareness. This is the pain of knowing that there's a more gorgeous world and yet believing that its

manifestation is impossible. This pain causes a restlessness that is sufficient to make its sufferer stir and wander, but not great enough to entirely wake her.

To wake up, the sleepwalker first needs to honestly admit that she's still asleep—sleeping is all she knows—and a part of her doubts that anything else lies beyond.

If you feel trapped or limited in life, admit it. Admit that the present way of things does not correspond to the deeper truth present within you. Admit what sleepwalking feels like, the dull pain of it.

The burden of a dreamer is to make consistently manifest for herself and for others the profound love and beauty she's encountered. As long as she denies her duty and her ability to bring forth this manifestation, she stays asleep in denial.

Denial of our extraordinary potential as healers and agents of evolution is a huge and pervasive danger to our souls. It causes us to do taxing and destructive things in order to stay asleep. In many cases, geniuses maintain their sleepwalking through acute addictions to drugs, sex, and food.

These addictions are so engrossing and seductive that they consume the spiritual energy the genius could otherwise use to awaken. In addiction, we become unendingly thirsty for things that are material substitutes for immaterial power. We try to fill a spiritual hunger with material substances, and we end up more thirsty and sick than ever—like drinking seawater and dying of thirst.

Less acutely, but ultimately no less destructively, a sleepwalking genius may numb herself with intellectual rationalizations, doubts, and self-criticisms. She convinces herself that the sleeping world is the only real one and insulates herself from full waking by concentrating intently on the practical details of achieving success and recognition in the sleeping world. She still participates in an addiction, but on a more general scale—she's an addict in the societal sphere, through consumption.

The frustrations of sleepwalking are so great that the dreamer may wish for ignorance—to be able to play the game of ordinary life without any suspicion of something more. But this is impossible. The call has happened. The restlessness has set in and must be fully dealt with.

How Soulmaking Kills Falsehood

In my time teaching soulmaking at the University of Pittsburgh, I met many students whose young lives were packed with pressure, overflowing with opportunity, and rife with falsehood.

Students from all corners of the university—business, neuroscience, pharmacy, history—would sign up for my course in order to fulfill a general requirement and would find themselves at the mercy of a crazed madwoman—namely, me.

When my students learned that soulmaking involved not just the reading of poetry (as the official course title suggested) but also the cultivation of poetic perception and the writing of poetic texts, these tightly wound, extremely brilliant young people would *freak out*—and with very good reason too.

Since soulmaking is the contemplative seeking of extrarational truths followed by the creative expression of those truths discovered, practicing it tends to take you right up into your system of denial, eventually confronting you with so much of its ripe fragrance that your carefully instilled program of socially learned untruth collapses amidst the fumes.

This can be extremely threatening, since many students have created gleaming lives for themselves that succeed fully at getting them social approval from their parents, peers, and all their professors—from everyone except for me, the eccentric hippy lady who babbles about truth and beauty all the time. Indeed, they've thrown their full genius into the creation of this, so it's a rather powerful front. It has a momentum all its own.

The tough thing about genius, though, is that it's *never* satisfied making a life that's false. It wants to make a life that's totally real—so it will screw with you relentlessly until you stop making lies and start making soul.

The poet and critic Edward Hirsch rightly observed that “poetry is a soulmaking activity.” In other words, practicing it has the effect of making you more fully yourself.

We accomplish this task of becoming more fully ourselves by deciding to read this world through the vulnerable wisdom of our hearts rather than through the steely criticism of our minds.

The poet Walt Whitman called our criticizing, calculating mind “the brain that divides,” and, not unlike Keats, he recommended abandoning it. (Once I gave an assignment that asked students to deeply engage with Whitman’s poetry, and one student fulfilled the assignment by making a stencil and spray-painting “Abandon the brain that divides” on a wall near her dorm. I wanted to give her a medal.)

Poetry is a soulmaking activity because it involves looking for the holistic truth that the heart sees, rather than the divisive truth of the mind, and then expressing that truth in a way that’s creative—i.e., in a way that *creates* an experience of that truth in other people. This creative expression isn’t limited to what folks conventionally recognize as poetry or art—we can creatively share truth with others in myriad ways, from the way we carry ourselves to the parties we throw.

The Painful Consequences of Living with Falsehood

So what happens if you’re a dreamer who has great genius and you don’t turn from lie-making to soulmaking?

I’ve observed the following symptoms: a propensity for disturbing nightmares, painful romances, dangerous accidents, drug addiction, emotional numbness, and chronic illness. Not all symptoms exist in one individual at one time, but there’s usually some combination at work. Also, I’ve met and loved folks who do have *all* the symptoms happening simultaneously—they wake up in cold sweats, have screaming matches with their paramours, scorch themselves with hot water while making oatmeal, smoke weed everyday, feel dead inside, and enjoy irritable bowel syndrome.

Such a multilayered extravagance of misery results when the level of delusion in one’s life is especially high—this kind of pain happens when one is not just deluding oneself but also deliberately deceiving others in order to perpetuate the delusion that one cherishes. A tangled web? Oh, yes.

You may be afflicted by one or more falsehood symptom and not even

realize or be able to admit just how much of a giant problem it is until you begin practicing contemplative truth-seeking and creative expression.

This was the case for Lilly, a high-achieving prelaw student in my soulmaking class who suffered from terrible nightmares. When she first learned that the class involved getting in touch with your heart's truth and expressing it in poetry, she balked—she explained to me that she “wasn't creative.”

When I voiced my skepticism about the matter of her non-creativity, she confessed that when she was young she loved writing poetry but had ceased when her grief over the death of someone very close to her made the attention and openness that writing demanded painful.

Lilly realized, rightly, that in order to write poetry, she would need to be connected to her poetic self, with all its swelling feelings, which would mean fully experiencing and exploring her immense grief. She felt that if she opened up to it, her grief would overwhelm her and destroy her.

In order to prevent being thus overwhelmed, Lilly had stopped writing poetry and had focused all of her genius into getting scholarships for college and then into getting the right grades for law school.

This would all be great except she had terrible insomnia because when she slept, nightmares about her losing her loved one would assail her.

Lilly noted that other people often told her she was cold and aloof—and she could see that they were right. She didn't want to open up to her friends, because she didn't want to feel anything at all. Lilly's decision to cover up her grief with business and achievement was a false solution.

I want to be clear that by calling Lilly's cover-up a “false solution” I am not deriding her or the rest of us who prop up our lives with similar makeshift splints.

When we come up with false solutions to the real problems of our existence, we do this not because of any personal lack of intelligence or imagination, but because our culture in general is wisdom deficient. There are very few places in our society where we can learn to practice the kind of open-eyed faith and salty optimism that it takes to endure the pain of loss, grief, and failure with no retreat into false solutions.

If you've got one or more of the difficult symptoms of long-term lie-

making happening in your life, I'm going to invite you to do what I've done, and what I invite my suffering students like Lilly do: seek living, breathing help.

Seek lots of help, in multiple forms. Therapists, life coaches, support groups, twelve-step fellowships, friends who are happy and healthy can all be fantastic resources. Do *not* call your friend who only has sex with married people, falls down stairs, drinks beer for breakfast, and frequently breaks out in hives, to help you with your nightmares, shouting matches, oatmeal burns, weed-smoking, and irritable bowel syndrome.

After you've established living, breathing support for yourself, I suggest that you undertake the same experiment in soulmaking that Lilly undertook to begin reclaiming her truth, her feeling self, and her creativity. And of course that means waking your genius.

Revering the Daimon

Paradoxically, as dreamers, in order to wake up from our sleepwalking, we need to go deeper into our dreaming. The stuff of our nighttime dreams, our poetry, our fancy, the various bits of psychic sparkly stuff that we habitually ignore and dismiss—this is the stuff we need to collect and interact with in deep reverence. By doing this, we honor our poet spirits, our daimons.

The daimon is our highest potential, our most powerful self. It's a spiritual image of possibility that hovers in our morphic field of energy and calls us to grow into it, just as the spiritual image of a resplendent oak hovers in the energy field surrounding an acorn. The daimon knows who we are and who we can be. It has a vivid connection to the daimon of the world, too, and connects us not only to our personal journey but to that of the planets.

Our egos resist attending with tender reverence and seriousness to our dreams and fantasies. "I have more important things to do" is its ever-present claim.

It takes sincere humility and rich honesty to embark on this project of uniting the conscious and the unconscious, order and energy. Honor

your struggles and your frustrations as you move forward with this process, because nothing about it is easy.

The play we're undertaking requires reverence and devotion—reverence for our own daimons, for all the poets around us (sleeping or waking), for every element of our environment, natural or humanmade. Our present culture derides reverence and devotion as foolish attitudes that make one vulnerable to manipulation and control.

Criticism and mocking are much more cool these days than earnest appreciation. But reverence is to the soul what the most nutritious food is to the body. The soul can live on irreverence and criticism, fault finding and cynicism—but these are poor nurturance. Our genius can come into its full vitality when we practice offering wonder and deep attention to the life around us. What we offer to the world is actually what we offer to our own soul, and our soul thrives or falls weak accordingly.

To have a weak soul, a starving genius, is to have a hungry ghost within, a monster who is never satisfied and will devour beauty and joy out of your life like the terrible Minotaur beneath the ancient city of Knossos on Crete who demanded sacrifices of youths and maidens. The Minotaur came into existence because King Minos of Crete refused to offer forth the great gift that had been bestowed to him. When out of fear and greed we refuse to offer our deepest gifts, we create a terror that eats us alive.

Reverence and devotion don't have to be heavy and dry. They can be light, erotic, liberating, and playful. All of the creative experiments in this book call upon your reverence and devotion in concrete practices.

How to Offer Reverence and Receive Strength

It's a good idea as you travel this path to practice offering your reverence and respect to every person you meet and your devotion to the spirit of love in them.

Try this: When in conversation, allow your own mind to grow very quiet as you listen to another person. Don't internally argue with or amend what the other person says. Offer your listening presence as a

whole gift. Be the presence of love for the one speaking. Don't concern yourself with approving or rejecting the content of what the person says or even who she is. Simply be present, open, and nonjudging. Be the space in which the other can unfold. When it's your turn to talk, your reply may come more slowly, since you haven't been busily formulating it as the other person spoke. Embrace and allow that slowness. See how it alters the quality of your communication and the enjoyment you have in conversation.

This is a gentle and practical form of meditation that strengthens your daimon and fuels your ecstatic awakening.

As you cultivate the silence within you through this kind of listening and through daily deep meditation, you will become much more sensitive to the spiritual nuances at work in your life and in your relationships. We all have spiritual senses, just as we have bodily senses. These spiritual senses go uncultivated in most of us; it's not something that's taught in most schools.

Once you've cultivated the ability to listen to others with inner quiet, reverence, and love, you'll find that you hear them in a whole other way. You hear them through your heart—you'll receive and partake of their heart's energy as you listen to them speak. Through this reception, you'll learn much more about the person you're listening to than you would through mere cognitive listening. You'll intuit their whole history of sorrows and joy, connections and solitudes. Sentences that formerly would have struck you as wrongheaded, which you would have previously dismissed, will now touch you differently. You'll feel the heart in those sentences, the energy within the form of the words—and you'll discern that you're able to receive rich and profound gifts from people you otherwise would ignore.

This practice is richly liberating, because through it you can learn how to love and sincerely enjoy a much greater range of people. By letting your judging mind recede, your daimon is free to be strengthened by the exchange of love and reverence with others.

The Cost of Denial

As we cultivate our reverence and devotion for others, we are able to be more fully present to our own dreams and fantasies, our own daimon.

To hear our hearts, we have to soften, to set aside for a time our concern with winning and surviving, and to tune instead to our own desire to evolve into something higher. We open ourselves to the gifts of the unconscious, of energy unbound, of Shakti, of dreaming.

We may have a long history of disclosing our dreams and fantasies, our wildest revelations, to others and being met with incomprehension and nonacknowledgment ranging from cool politeness to blatant cruelty. It could be that we've been seeking permission from others for a long time to be our fully empowered, daimonic self.

This seeking is not evidence of a weakness or a character flaw on our part. It's natural to seek validation of our real selves, and real potential from those around us.

The trouble is that we live in a culture where most other people, even those who love us dearly, are themselves spiritually and emotionally wounded to a profound degree and therefore unable to properly see or receive us with the kind of reverence and devotion we've just been talking about—which is actually the right of every soul to receive.

We've sought reverence and validation from others, and we have not received it. The pain of this is tremendous and can feed our feeling of helplessness.

We're in a very difficult position. We have to exercise the courage to give to ourselves the reverence that the people around us can't and won't be able to provide. This decision is frightening, because it feels like we're going against the common social reality and inventing our own—and this is indeed exactly what we're doing—because our common social reality is lacking and ailing.

We have to have faith that our dreams and inklings are worthy of tender attention, embodiment, development, reflection. No rational or objective argument can support us in this choice to love ourselves so wildly. Love is never “justified.” It's always a leap of faith, a leap that takes us out of the mainstream and much more fully into ourselves.

By choosing to believe something we cannot objectively know to be true (that we and everything else are worthy of rich reverence), we take radical responsibility for our own existence. This radical responsibility has the effect of causing us to become more fully subjective. The

existential philosopher Kierkegaard remarked that everyone thinks it's easy to be subjective—but actually it's the hardest thing of all, to become fully and fearlessly oneself. It's a project that means withdrawing oneself from the safety of general agreement about how reality functions and who we are.

The Lies of the Mad World and How to Break Free

There is a very pervasive web of falsehoods that the dreamer must wake from in order to start on her path. These are the lies of the mad world, the system of delusion maintained by human drama and ignorance. “The mad world” is a shorthand name for all the misconceptions and confusions that lead us to create a world of cruel competition and exaggerated scarcity, a world where profit is considered more important than human need.

The mad world is a condition in which we're desperately trying to control ourselves, other people, and all the factors that surround us out of an intense survival anxiety. It's a world in which technology and science, surveillance and laws, discipline and punishment are used to maximum effect in order to produce a very tenuous and unsustainable version of security in which we're not only not actually safe but also bored and depressed. The mad world is the result of a severe lack of imagination, a dearth of the visionary poet's perception that reveals the underlying flow uniting all phenomenon.

A fundamental lie of the mad world, and one that the soulmaker must confront early on, is this: “You are who we say you are.”

The game of “You are who we say you are” begins at birth, when we receive our names, and continues through our educations and our childhoods. We internalize the “You are who we say you are” game and come to believe “I am who they say I am.” We learn to believe the things about ourselves that other people tell us. We trust the perception of our family and teachers and friends above our own. We trust them implicitly—they seem to know more than we do, they seem to know who we are,

and we believe them.

The trouble is that very often the people around us lack the visionary perception that would allow them to see who we truly are—resonant, pulsing, powerful, and beautiful loci of awakening. Instead, the people around us see only their own perception of us, a perception influenced and distorted by a million different factors, but mostly conditioned by the limits of who they believe themselves to be.

Playing the “I am who they say I am” game usually goes fine until we start to notice that sometimes it hurts to believe that we are who they say we are.

The dreamer embarks on her journey when she decides to absolutely stop playing the “I am who they say I am” game and radically reclaims her right to define her own identity. This decision constitutes a crossing of a major threshold. It takes her beyond the pale of the ordinary social world. It’s a decision that is easy to say but much more difficult to carry out. It launches the poet into a vulnerable, liminal state wherein she lacks an identity dictated by others and does not yet possess a fully formed identity of her own making. This state of vulnerability can be intensely disorienting and uncomfortable. We tend to cling to our identification with whatever we’ve been told about ourselves, because any identity is more secure than uncertainty, namelessness, spaciousness, and not knowing. Yet those are the difficulties we need to embrace as we set out. We need to deny and strip away any limited notions about ourselves that we may carry.

What would it mean for you to cede yourself from the definitions placed upon you by your family, your local culture? What would it feel like? What could you experience in yourself once removed from the name, identity, and limits given to you by others? Write your answers to these questions in your common-place book.

Begin to experiment with making the decision within yourself to “cede,” to “stop being theirs.” Write out affirmations of your decision in your common-place book, practice saying it silently to yourself, and see what arises. What would hold you back from stepping outside your socially defined identity? What do you still hope to gain from it? Keep practicing your decision—writing it, saying it, thinking it. This takes focus and repetition, energy and concentration. You won’t accomplish it in just one sitting. It’s a decision to be made again and again, until it hits

the core of you.

The Truths of the Gift World and How to Live Them

When the lies of the mad world have all been broken with, a condition of grace appears that has been widely reported by the mystics and sages of the world. It's been variously called the "Kingdom of Heaven," "Nirvana," and "the Tao," among many other names. I like to call it the gift world, because it's a subjective experience of total, unreserved gratitude in which everything that appears is experienced as a priceless and delightful gift. This condition confounds and contradicts all the rules of the mad world. In the mad world, nothing is free, and every "gift" creates a burden of debt. In the gift world, all is free, and no debt is possible. The gift world is the condition of bliss experienced by a fully evolved soul. One way of thinking about the gift world is that it's a morphic field of joy and love that shapes systems under its influence into expressions of joy and love—i.e., into gifts.

In the gift world, since you have no need to control, there's no fear. As the teacher Adyashanti has observed, fear is just a by-product of frustrated control. In the gift world, you do things, but nothing you do is "work" in the sense that we've come to think of it, because your security and your identity don't come from what you accumulate as a result of your effort. Instead, you give your efforts freely, accruing no obvious security or bolstering to your separate ego-self. As you give in this manner, your wants and needs are subsequently mysteriously met in delightful and miraculous ways by the universe.

This miraculous movement happens because, as Lewis Hyde wrote in his seminal work *The Gift*, when gifts received are consumed or passed on, the spiritual power at work in the gift grows—more is drawn forth, more gifts flow to you. When gifts received are hoarded, stored up, or used only to accrue individual gain, the spiritual power at work in the gift departs—it dries up, and no more gifts come to you. The gift spirit as it moves creates connection and joy, satisfaction and fulfillment, among

a circle of givers and receivers. The gift as it is hoarded creates disconnection and ennui, alienation and discontent.

Our genius is clearly a gift given to us by the source. We didn't manufacture our genius deliberately, of our own clever device. We didn't make it out of duct tape and cardboard. It came to us freely, from outside our own will and effort. When we dreamers use our gift of genius only to promote ourselves, only to make ourselves as individual egos more secure and safe in a seemingly threatening universe—we then betray the spirit of the gift. We become hoarders. The genius then stops giving us ideas and inspirations and means to carry those out, because we've proven ourselves ungrateful. When we wrongly use gifts graciously bestowed upon us as possessions to which we are entitled, the spirit of the gift dies.

It was a revelation to me when I learned from Lewis Hyde about the need of the gift to move. While it made deep sense to me on one level, on another it contradicted the perverse notions of gift reception that I'd learned in childhood: gifts are given to me on my birthday and at Christmas and they are MINE, all MINE. I was taught that to give away a gift that I received as a birthday or a Christmas present was rude. Not only this, but I was prevented from actually formally reciprocating the gifts given to me.

When I was invited as a guest to the birthday parties of other children, the birthday gifts bestowed on my friends by "me" were plastic toys bought by my mother. I was not allowed to give the pine cones and twigs, the flowers, and quartz pebbles I really wanted to give. The toys my mother presented did not come from me—they had nothing to do with me. I was deluged with gifts and yet kept out of the circle of giving—and perhaps unsurprisingly, the gifts I was given in this fashion meant nothing to me on a deep level. They represented nothing to me but a hoard of "my" toys. The ethos of giving and receiving taught to me thus denied the actual spirit of the gift.

Awakening your genius is a path of learning to embrace and embody the real spirit of the gift: it's a cycle of learning to embrace with rich gratitude all that comes to us, to transform it and to be transformed by it, and then to give it forth again for others to be also inspired.

Experiment 1: Hearing Your Heart's Call

In order to start our mythic journey to end our suffering, we need to enter into a real and dynamic dialogue with our hearts. Start by writing a letter to your heart, telling it all that's going on with you now and asking it for guidance.

After you've written this letter to your heart, write a response to yourself from your heart's perspective. In other words, create a letter *from* your heart *to* you. Your heart knows things that your conscious mind doesn't. In order to access that intuitive knowing, it will help if you write your letter from your heart to yourself in dreamsppeak.

What's Dreamsppeak?

Dreamsppeak is a mode of language that accesses the same tools of interweaving and meaning-making that our nighttime dreams use. It's the language of the unconscious.

Dreamsppeak has the following characteristics:

- ◆ No use of the verb "to be"

This means that dreamsppeak avoids all conjugations of "to be," including be, being, am, is, are, will be, was, were, and have been. Similar simple verbs that dreamsppeak *does* allow include become, has, have, do, can, will, should, ought, may, remain, and equal. Dreamsppeak excludes "to be" verbs because such verbs have a tendency to imply stasis and absolute identity, where actually the soul knows that only activity and fluidity present themselves.

- ◆ Metaphoric naming

Dreamsppeak disallows conventional or habitual proper names for people and places. Instead, dreamsppeak invites you to coin new names

for people and places based on descriptive or associate qualities. For example, if you're writing about your friend John in dreampeak, you would not call him John but perhaps "The Long-Haired Wanderer." If you're writing about Australia, you might rename Australia "Upside-Down Land." Dreampeak also discourages conventional or habitual names for everyday objects and invites you to coin new names for those too. So for example—in dreampeak, you might call a tree a "spreads-forth" or a "tall green."

◆ Allusions

Dreampeak invites elaborate and associative references to words and things and places you've experimented in books, films, travel, foreign languages, conversation—and, of course, nighttime dreams. If you've dreamed recently about being trapped inside an amusement park closed for wintertime with a pack of rabid dogs, you might allude to those dogs and that park in your dreampeak. If you've been reading books on yoga and you're fascinated with the Sanskrit vocabulary of yogic practices, you might include some of those words in your dreampeak.

◆ Portmanteaus

In dreampeak, we're free to make up new words by combining elements from already-existing words to create new in-between meanings. So if a landscape is both rocky and boring, we might in dreampeak say that it's "bucky" or "roring" or even just "bocking."

◆ Neologisms

Go ahead and just plain make up words and expressions.

◆ Sensory Amplification

If you get stuck or slowed down in your dreampeak writing, you might try amplifying something that you've already noted by describing it with similes that reference all five of the physical senses. So maybe you've written the word "soil." You might go on to say, "The soil smells like tar. It looks like the spit-up of baby plants. It sounds like insects

toiling. It feels like a soft disaster. It tastes like the end of a night.”

◆ Nonlinear

In dreampeak, there’s no need for a linear narrative or argument to be present. Feel free to just riff. You might spiral around a topic or an idea in several different ways. You might go on wild tangents. That’s perfect.

◆ Puns

Dreampeak invites puns. Puns are simultaneously plays on the meanings and the sounds of words or phrases. Once, puns were considered a very high form of humor— isn’t that hilarious? Well, *I* at least find it punny.

◆ Free association

Maybe you write down “daffodil” and that makes you think of old Victorian daguerreotypes, which makes you remember the guy you dated once who was really into those and hated Christmas, which makes you think of how you really love Christmas, which makes you think of your complicity in American consumer junk culture, which makes you think about the soft pretzels and slushies that they sold at Hill’s when you were a kid and your mom took you there and the popcorn was always stale. So in dreampeak, go ahead and write about all that: “Daffodil daguerreotype Matt Christmas junk Mother Hill’s layaway pretzel slushies stale.”

◆ No fidelity to “reality” required

In dreampeak, it’s fine to write about or be inspired by “real” events and things, but you’re not at all limited to describing reality. You have full poetic license to wildly make stuff up.

So, using dreampeak and writing as if from your heart to your conscious self, discover the following: What does your heart ask you to do? What does it warn you about? What does it know about your potential that you don’t know yet? How is it beckoning you forward to

the gift of ecstatic joy? What sounds, smells, sights, places, visions, scents does it invoke in order to call you onward? How does it address you? What instructions does it give you?

Write for at least twenty minutes, uninterrupted.

Processing the Letter

Now take a break from the letter. Do something grounding and practical: wash the dishes, go for a walk. When you return, reread the letter slowly, imagining that it's not just nonsense or "poetry" but a real missive from the center of your being that you have a deep obligation to understand and then to take into account in the way you live your life. Now write about the experience of receiving this letter from your heart. How does it make you feel to receive such a letter? What does each sentence, each image, do to you? Take your time and describe your reaction to the letter without judgment.

By giving this kind of weight and seriousness, this kind of attention and reflection, to the "nonsense" that comes in dreamspeak from our hearts, we are doing something very different from what we usually do. We are powerfully admitting that we can no longer ignore our heart's wisdom, that we must attend to it and give it weight. This is a deeply integrative act that will ultimately lead to us being able to inhabit our genius and the gift world it draws. In doing this work, we admit that we can't find our way to the gift world with only the power of our conscious minds—we have to delve deeper, into the realm of image and dream and feeling.

As you reflect, answer the following questions about your heart's letter in writing:

- ◆ What phrase or sentence out of all that you've written strikes you as the most attractive?
- ◆ What about that attracts you ?
- ◆ What phrase or sentence strikes you as the *least* relevant?
- ◆ What about that seems irrelevant?

- ✦ If that phrase *were* relevant to you, who would you be?
- ✦ How do you feel about the way your heart addresses you?
- ✦ What do you notice about how your heart describes you?
- ✦ What do you notice about what your heart asks you to do?
- ✦ What unknown territory does your heart call you toward?
- ✦ What would it feel like to arrive at the place your heart calls you to?

Action

Every day for a week, spend an extended period fully and richly imagining what it would feel like to arrive at the place your heart calls you to.

Example Letter

Here's what my heart wrote to me the first time I practiced this Experiment:

Mirabilis,

If you follow the thorough-wood to the end of debt, rewards come. All the edges of the Green House cry out for you. There rises a scent on the air of muddled plum. Go to the ripeness. Live purpled. Open your mouth at the jar. Tell the longest tale. The sound belongs to the shaman boy playing the piano in the dark cavern bottomed by long orange moss, along with the violin.

Surrender what you have tried to make. Surrender becoming grand and whole and simply live it, like the moth on the window. Stop seeking permission to live a vast art. Respect the art that you do every moment, give it loving attention. The sound of this call sounds with the violin and piano at the cavern, sounds with the dance you perform at the end of the ledge. Make your respect for

you as huge as the great water. Don't dare to doubt the act as it unfolds, though you think no one else sees it. Don't dare to disrespect the symphony your essence broadcasts each moment.

I promise you a juicing pear, the song Hallelujah, a couch in the kitchen. I promise you the bliss of Mirabai, the visit of the flute player, the ecstasy of Rumi. I promise you your *sushumna* shining like a beacon. I promise you the whole freedom, the freedom of total respect.

You look like the ragged meadow. You sound like the piano in the cavern. You smell like the honeysuckle on the cityscape. You sound like the silence of electric voices. You feel like the inside of a hot window. You taste like the newness of death.

Love,
Your Heart

Example Processing

Here's my work on the call in my heart's letter:

- ◆ What phrase out of all that your heart told you resonates with you as most pertinent?

"Stop seeking permission to live a vast art. Respect the art that you do every moment, give it loving attention."

- ◆ What about this catches you most? What grabs your attention?

The notion that my whole life could be a "vast art," and that I could deeply respect it as such, is attention-grabbing and inspiring. It's certainly a lot more than the world at large encourages me to do in terms of respecting myself. It makes me feel like *daring* to respect myself that much.

- ◆ What phrase or sentence most repels you, or strikes you as the least relevant to your situation?

"Go to the ripeness. Live purpled."

✦ What about that repels you or seems irrelevant?

It sounds like something from a fluffy '90s self-help book for women. I mean, I kind of ferociously love those books—but it sounds goofy and cheesy. It reminds me of my ex-best-friend, who shared my love for those kinds of books and who loved purple and loved fruits.

✦ If that phrase were relevant, what would it be relevant to?

The sense that I have recently of coming close to fruition, of approaching my real self, of letting my freak flag fly.

✦ How do you feel about the way your heart addressed you?

It's scary that it calls me "Mirabilis," because that means "miracle worker" to me and I still don't feel like I *know* how to work miracles—yet I know that sometimes they *do* happen through my work—people getting spiritually and aesthetically turned on. I still don't feel like I know how to harness or regulate these miracles. So I still feel very amateur.

✦ What do you notice about how your heart addresses you?

My heart describes me in terms of things I've seen and felt and smelled today, things that were very beautiful and that writing is so inadequate to capture—things that I feel in general inadequate to capture. Things that I generally just try to take into my consciousness and let work on me, let become me. So I guess that's why my heart describes me in those terms.

✦ What do you notice about what your heart asks you to do?

There are a lot of ritual elements in it—I feel like I'm being ordered to be a priestess again, like I was as a child when I was a colombe in the Rosicrucian temple my father attended. I feel like I'm being asked to put myself at risk—"this is the dance you perform at the end of the ledge."

✦ What unknown territory does your heart call you toward?

"The end of debt," "the bliss of Mirabai," "the whole freedom."

✦ What would it feel like to arrive at the place your heart calls you to?

Deep power, freedom from self-doubt or self-reproach, being internally, rather than externally, guided. Not looking for external reassurance. Nonconditionally regarding myself as an amazing work of art, liberated from disrespecting myself under *any* circumstances—thus able to love myself unconditionally under all circumstances.

Check-Ins

Write your responses to these questions in your common-place book.

1. Are you practicing metta cultivation? What are you experiencing so far in your practice?
2. Are you writing down your dreams in the morning in your common-place book? What are you dreaming about? What elements in your dreams intrigue you? These intriguing elements can suggest to you things and situations in your life you may need to get honest with yourself about as you tune in to your heart's call. What might those things be?
3. What fearful thoughts or doubts do you have about undertaking this soulmaking work to awaken your genius? Is it silly, a waste of time, too dangerous? Make a list. Circle the thought that strikes you as most stressful or paralyzing. Now slow down and ask your heart the following questions, taking time to write out your responses: Does that thought describe reality? How do I live when I accept that thought as a true report about what's real? How would I feel now and what might I do if I had no ability to accept that thought as real?

STEP TWO

Accepting the Call

Recognizing that we're sleepwalking, becoming willing to dream more richly and more reverently in order to wake up, seeing the cost of our denial, beginning to practice metta cultivation and keep a common-place book, deciding to become self-defining, speaking to and listening to our heart—these are potent practices that stir the energies in our world.

Despair

As we begin to strengthen and to act upon our desire to wake up and embody our genius, to cease being defined by the perceptions of others, this world, our dream, begins to respond—but we may not yet be able to see how that response is working.

After writing the letters from ourselves to our heart and to ourselves from our heart, we may feel a flood of despair. We may realize the severity of our situation and not trust that we can evolve out of it. It can seem like our heart has asked impossible things of us.

At this point it's tempting to abandon the path we've stepped onto and to retreat back to our project of trying to get by in the mad world with what we already know how to do.

The trouble is that we're called to bring into fruition another world altogether, and in order to know how to create this new world, we need to venture far into our inner life. To refuse our call, to stay in the mad world when we've been invited to the extraordinary, is a foolhardy

proposition that exposes us to all kinds of calamities—for the power of our genius will work on us, whether we go willingly or no.

We don't need to despair. We don't need to stay sunk in self-pity, because the work we've been called to do is seemingly impossible, because the world does not yet appear to support us. We still need to win the favor of the gods with our courage and our commitment. We can be empowered by the recognition that we're not meant to do this work just for our own glory—we're doing this for the benefit of everyone—and along the way, our egos will become softer and more translucent. There are selfish heroes, like Jason of Jason and the Argonauts—but those adventurers suffer consequences for their arrogance. We're not undertaking this journey arrogantly, looking to steal something from the gods for our own glory. We're humbly submitting ourselves to an adventure beyond our conscious design, so that through it we may bring something back to enrich everyone and alter this world.

One of my favorite mad poet-prophets, William Blake, observed that “the eye altering, alters all.” In other words, when we change our perception, the whole world around us changes. Herein lies our solution to the deep pain we can find ourselves in.

Abandon the Brain That Divides

I suggest that our ability to cling to falsehood and generate stuckness and boringness in our lives arises from the fact that we've learned to use the opposite of poetic perception: fragmented perception. We all come into the world as perfectly honest and expressive young geniuses, but school and society beat that out of us right quick.

Our culture is dominated by what the poet Walt Whitman called “the brain that divides.” We learn to see ourselves as isolated little egos who have to fight and scrap and scrape in order to hold on to our little drops of comfort or pleasure or power.

We feel threatened by the other isolated little egos outside of us who might try to take these things away. We have to push ourselves harder and harder to continue to win, to protect what we have, to get more.

Within this perception of fragmentation, we see everything, including

our own bodies and talents and the natural world, as objects to be manipulated in order to attain some end.

It's only in this fragmented perception that a life of untruth can spring up, because falsehood seeks to manipulate the vast and messy unfolding of our lives into a neat and pretty picture that we're confident will gain the approval of others and thus secure us our comfort, pleasure, and power.

When we are able to see ourselves and life from this perspective of wholeness, we are better able to recognize our untruth.

This honest recognition is enabled by the wholeness of poetic perception, because we create our falsehood in the first place in an attempt to deal with the fragmentation and alienation we perceive.

A Very High Sort of Seeing

In his essay "The Poet," Emerson describes in great detail someone who has a solid grasp on poetic perception—namely, the ideal poet. According to Emerson, the ideal poet has an intuition of unity that is so total that it constitutes a kind of dramatic enlightenment, a state of higher realization. Emerson refers to this unitive insight as "Imagination." He tells us that Imagination is "a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees; by sharing the path or circuit of things through forms, and so making them translucid to others."

Yet in order to awaken our genius and become lucid, it's not necessary to be fully possessed of this realization of underlying oneness, and certainly not necessary to "believe" in it—it's only necessary to be willing to move toward it—in other words, to soften one's sense of oneself as a limited, isolated entity, as a thinking subject for whom the world (including your talents and your body) is merely a mess of objects to be manipulated for socially approved ends.

We can enter poetic perception by ceasing to take ourselves and our lives so literally. We can start to take ourselves symbolically instead.

Experiment 2: Accepting the Heart's Call

Rewrite the letter you wrote from your heart to yourself in Experiment 1 ([this page](#)), so that you turn every directive and every bit of information that your heart supplied you with into a commitment, promise, or affirmation. For example, if your heart told you in the initial letter to "Raise up the roses to the rooftops," then you would now write a promise: "I will raise up the roses to the rooftops." If your heart told you in the initial letter that "You smell like iodine," then you would now write an agreement: "I will smell like iodine."

As you write, know that these are *real* commitments you are making. In order to carry on your journey to ecstatic fulfillment, you will need to meet *all* of these commitments. "What?" you might say, "You mean I actually have to raise up roses to rooftops? But why would I do that? It's nonsense! And why the hell would I ever want to smell like iodine?" YES. It's complete nonsense to you, to your rational mind. But the soul is larger than you, larger than your conscious persona. It's vast, and it has its reasons for wanting you to raise roses to rooftops, reasons that are way more than your waking, ordinary mind can comprehend. The important thing is that you resist the temptation to dismiss your heart's instructions or to take them lightly.

In order for the alchemical process to work, you must take on profound responsibility for doing the symbolic, magical, poetic, and nonsensical things that your heart is asking of you. "But I don't even know what some of these things mean!" you may protest. And that's true. There may be things that your heart tells you to do that at the present just boggle your mind or even sound dangerous. What's important now is to keep an open mind about those things. Know that as you continue in the process, more will become clear to you. You'll gradually come to understand all of your heart's instructions and understand ways of fulfilling them that are all completely safe and loving to you and everyone around you. Yet this understanding only comes upon your prior commitment and acceptance of the "nonsense." The heart doesn't reveal its truths to one who's not serious about taking its directives. After you make your commitment to accept your heart's call in all its apparent whimsicality, pointlessness, and danger, you'll

start to get ideas for simple, wholesome actions in the world that you can take to fulfill your promises.

The simple (yet deeply symbolically charged) actions that you will take to fulfill the instructions in your heart's letter are the first steps of the adventure you're commencing.

After you've written out your acceptance of your heart's instructions, notice how you feel. Most of the people I work with feel a sense of wonder and excitement as they contemplate the decisions they've made to leave behind the surface level of reality (where they act only "reasonably") and to enter the deeper level, where action is more than reasonable—it's imaginative and luminous with meaning.

Processing

Now, one by one, take each promise and agreement you've made with your heart, and brainstorm possible ways you can do those things in the real world. For example, you've written "I will raise up the roses to the rooftops." How will you do that?

This depends on your awareness of what the persons, places, and things in the agreement mean to you. Maybe a friend of yours has a roof that's safe to access, and she sunbathes on it. You could call her up and bring her a real bouquet of roses. In this way, you would succeed in "raising up the roses to the rooftops." We might say that this is a "literal" enactment of the commitment. Or perhaps as you're writing you realize that "roses" to you are a code word for "beautiful things" and "rooftops" to you means "a place where everyone can see." Maybe then you understand that your task is to put beautiful things in your life on display, to share them. We might say that this is "abstract" enactment of the commitment. Really, the distinction between the literal and the abstract can't be very strong here, because whatever it is we're doing when we attempt to fulfill our heart's dreamspoke instruction is necessarily symbolic and beyond the ordinary prosaic mode of daily life.

I suggest, however, erring on the side of the literal. Don't assume that every noun and action in your letter refers to inner qualities that you can understand right now, and thus avoid having to deal with actual roses

and the actual inconvenience of finding a rooftop—don't force a "translation."

It may be that you will only understand at a deep level what the "roses" or beautiful things in your life are *after* you have taken actual roses to an actual rooftop. As much as you can without endangering yourself or others, take the instructions of your heart at "face value" and interact with the tangible material world as per your heart's instructions.

Yet ultimately, whether you bring real roses to a real rooftop or put on display some beautiful things where everyone can see doesn't matter. There isn't one "right" way to fulfill your commitment to your heart. What matters is the intention and imaginative energy you put into your attempt. The point is that you don't attempt to slack or shirk your duty, that you give it your best effort. With that intention and energy, your heart can take over and make magic happen that's beyond your conscious will.

"What magic could possibly happen just from me bringing a bouquet of roses to my friend on her roof? That's such a mundane, simple thing to do. I thought this was supposed to be a big dreamy adventure!"

Bringing a bouquet of roses to your friend is a mundane, simple thing to do, which becomes a thrilling adventure *due to your underlying motivation*. You're not doing it because the mood struck you, or since it's her birthday, or because you wanted to cheer her up. You're doing it because you've surrendered a degree of your conscious, rational persona's will to the extrarational demands of the heart.

Your bringing of the bouquet is an act of deep humility, of obedience to something more vast and beautiful than your ordinary mind knows. Not only that—but because the action was dictated to you by this larger and opaque intelligence, you will eventually discover that the consequences of your action are much larger and more positive than you could have ever known or predicted in advance.

You're now participating in a web of poetry, of divine making, that's larger than you know, and this participation is magical and full of grace. Because you are acting at the level of the soul rather than of the mind, and with the intention of positively evolving, your actions will have beautifully expansive soul consequences.

The simple gesture of bringing a bouquet of roses to a friend's rooftop will start a chain of energies and happenings in motion, which will then

themselves lead you further into the mystery of your transformation in a nonlinear and nonsensible way that you cannot know or predict in advance.

You might ask yourself these questions about each line of your acceptance of your heart's call:

- ✦ How could this correspond to places, persons, and things in my actual life?
- ✦ How could I carry this out? What would it take to fulfill what my heart is asking of me here?
- ✦ Can I amplify a greater meaning out of this pun or play on words?

Action

There may be now many commitments that you've made to your heart that you don't presently understand how to enact in the world. Maybe you have a solid idea about just one. Do that one thing. Trust that as you act, more will be revealed to you, over the course of these seven steps, about how to fulfill your other commitments.

It can help a great deal to memorize your commitments to your heart. This way, as you're walking around in your life, you'll be more likely to immediately recognize places or actions that could help you fulfill your commitments.

Example Letter

Here's what my heart's call to me looked like after I turned it around into a series of commitments and agreements and also expanded or riffed upon the puns that I noticed:

Dear Heart,

I will follow through the thorough-wood to the end of debt-doubt

and find the reward. I will go to the edges of the Green House. I will find the scent of muddled plum and go to the ripeness. I will live purpled.

I will open my mouth at the jar. I will tell the longest tale. I will give the song to the shaman boy.

I will surrender what I have tried to make. I will surrender becoming grand and whole and simply live like a moth on the window.

I will stop seeking permission to live a vast art. I will respect the art that I do every moment, and give it loving attention.

I will put myself in harmony with the violin and piano of the cavern. I will dance at the end of the ledge. I will make my respect for myself as huge as the great water.

I won't dare to doubt the art as it unfolds, though I think no one else sees it. I won't dare to disrespect the symphony my essence broadcasts each moment.

I will claim the juicing pear, the song Hallelujah, the couch in the kitchen. I will accept the bliss of Mirabai, the visit of the flute player, the ecstasy of Rumi. I will accept my *sushumna* shining like a beacon.

I accept the whole freedom, the freedom of total respect.

I agree to look like the ragged meadow. I agree to sound like the piano in the cavern. I agree to smell like the honeysuckle on the city slope. I agree to sound like the silence of electric voices. I agree to feel like the inside of a hot window. I agree to taste like the newness of death.

Carolyn Elliot

Here are my brainstorming notes about concrete actions to take in order to embody my heart's call out in the world:

♦ "Follow through the thorough-wood"

Read *Walden Pond*? ("Thorough" sounds like "Thoreau," who lived in the woods.)

Return to the woods behind my childhood house where I used to play.

Go to Bandi Shaum (a wild and hard-to-access city park, the site of an upcoming Solstice celebration with my friends) and play a game like I used to play in childhood.

- ◆ “To the end of debt-doubt”

I have no idea! The place where I no longer feel indebted?

- ◆ “Go to the edges of the Green House”

A house on my childhood street, Northfield Avenue?

A house on my present street? Where is a green house?

Phipps flower conservatory?

- ◆ “Scent of muddled plum”

Fruit trees? Plum trees? Where can I find some plum trees?

- ◆ “Live purpled”

Buy / create more purple clothes and accessories? Live in a flush of embarrassment and boldness? Take more risks?

- ◆ “Open my mouth at the jar”

Drink more water? (I always drink from re-used jars.)

What is the “jar”?

- ◆ “I will tell the longest tale”

Write the story about the shaman girl who is rightly educated? (This is an idea for a novel I had had the previous week.)

Write the magic book? (This is a poetry book I’d been working on.)

- ◆ “Give the song to the shaman boy”

Sing to Nice Nate? (Nice Nate is the DJ name of the young man I saw playing the piano—I called him “the shaman boy” in my dreamspeak, because in dreamspeak we don’t use proper names.)

- ◆ “I will surrender what I have tried to make”

My dissertation? My career as an academic, a poet?

- ◆ “I will become the moth on the window”

Content to be outside, away from the light, the flame—or getting as close to it as I can and gazing at it?

- ◆ “I will stop seeking permission to live a vast art”

I will start respecting myself as a shaman-artist.

- ◆ “Put myself in harmony with the violin and piano at the cavern”

Join a musical group?

Start singing the next time I'm with people?

- ✦ "Dance at the end of the ledge"

Dance at the ledge at Bandi Shaum, a forty-foot drop? That's too scary!

- ✦ "I will accept my *sushumna* shining"

I could get my friends to paint my spine gold with bodypaint at the Solstice.

I should practice metta cultivation.

Here are some simple, direct actions I took in the world in order to begin acting on my commitment to my heart:

- ✦ I saw a beautiful purple rose at the market and bought it for myself—hey, "Live purpled," right? I then proceeded to attempt to paint pictures of the rose with pastels, my first pictures in a long time.
- ✦ I wore a purple top in my headshot pictures taken that week.
- ✦ I was too embarrassed by the notion of just singing to Nice Nate the next time I saw him, so I decided to find a song that I thought he might like ("Diamond Day," by Vashti Bunyan) on YouTube and post it to his Facebook wall. As I was playing the song on YouTube for myself to hear and review it, I also accidentally pressed a button on Nate's Facebook page, which made an electronic song of his play. The two songs playing together, Vashti Bunyan's and Nate's, sounded like a very haunting and gorgeous mash-up. I let him know this when I posted on his wall. He enjoyed the combination of the songs too—exclaimed his amazement and thanked me.
- ✦ I continued to practice metta cultivation and experienced an increasing and sometimes overwhelming flow of ecstasy in my body and energy field.
- ✦ I decided that "the thorough-wood" was Bandi Shaum and committed myself more strongly to realizing a wonderful outcome for the Solstice celebration I was helping to organize.

Surrender

As you write your acceptance letter, you might find yourself experiencing a momentous, luminous expansion—the realization that you’re finally taking seriously all the “nonsense” that your unconscious mind produces—taking it as serious directions for your life, and thereby *surrendering* some of your rational control to it. Deciding to consider the requests of your dreamspeaking heart just as prominently as that of your reasoning mind is a huge leap forward as a poet.

To take symbolic actions just because your heart has asked you to do so is to take a risk—the risk of other people thinking you’re nuts. In this way it’s an action of the dance of faith, the kind of faith that makes you more fully subjective, as Kierkegaard would say, or more fully individuated, as Jung would say. It’s an action that builds on the decision that you’ve made to stop playing the game of “I am who they say I am” because it takes you a step outside the bounded rules of the social reality we live in, the reality that says all grownups need to have logical reasons for doing what they do. In accepting the call of your heart, you eschew logic for passion and intuition. You let yourself be led by something larger than logic. You give yourself over to the mystery.

To take symbolic action in the world just because your heart has asked you to is to turn your life into a work of art, into an intuitively sculpted thing.

You may find that accepting your heart’s injunction will give you a vivid satisfaction, a feeling of interpenetrating life’s mysteries, a feeling of being at play within your life instead of just enduring it, a sense of excitement and enlargement.

As I did the exercise for the first time, I felt as if a secret, inner path to my life was being shown to me, a path I had simply not known to take seriously before. A path that would weave together the layers of dreaming that constitute my life and everyone’s life—the dream of reality, and the dreams of nighttime.

The exercise of accepting your heart’s call teaches you how to submit to the dictates of your own soul, a submission that is actually the only true freedom and one that you will need to perform again and again throughout your life.

Resentment and Forgiveness

Resentments are a major source of suffering for dreamers who have been abused. We can use our resentments toward a positive end by allowing them to point us to our limitations and show us where we are identified with a story about ourselves that's not true. Our resentments can show us where we are allowing the negative, false perceptions of others to define us. They can do this because a resentment is really just a feeling of helplessness. We feel helpless wherever we've ceded our power of self-definition to others.

For a long time I felt resentful that more of my writing had not been published. I felt like my work was just as good as the stuff I'd seen printed elsewhere—so why couldn't I seem to win the big prizes my colleagues were winning?

Tracing my resentment to its source, I realized that I was hoping for the perceptions of others to define me, to decide my quality and value as a writer. I craved recognition and affirmation, and yet at a deep level I didn't believe myself worthy of it—precisely because I preferred to wait to be deemed “worthy” rather than taking on the radical, self-defining choice of believing that I *was* worthy.

I feared to make the decision to believe wholly in my own worth—what if I decided that I was a great writer with a good heart—and I somehow turned out to be *wrong*? My mind worried that this could happen, and that being proved wrong in such a fashion would be more humiliation than I could ever endure. I decided instead to withhold confidence in myself and wait until the outer world would confirm “objectively” that I was indeed a worthwhile author and person.

What I failed to understand is that concepts of worth and value have no objective existence and can never be proven. They can only be subjectively experienced. And what I further did not understand was that my own subjective experience of my worth as a writer and a person deeply influences others' subjective experience of that worth and also my own future development.

This influence happens because my sense of my worth—my imagination of myself and my abilities—is part of the information that constitutes the morphic field that surrounds me and pervades me. The

soul is responsive to the images and feelings that I pour into it, and it also actively creates with these images and feelings—it shapes me, and it shapes others' perceptions of me, according to what I give to it. All fields, all souls are really just pockets of the same field, the same soul. They are all interconnected and all available to be intuitively read and assessed by others.

Everyone who meets me, through my direct physical presence or through my writing, picks up on the information in my personal field and comes to know more about me than I consciously intend to express. Those who meet me may not realize that they're reading my field, but they are. They're getting a sense of me, they're seeing who I am and who I'm becoming, what intentions I hold, what possibilities.

This information is constantly broadcast and constantly received at a subtle level. It's suprasensory information that can readily override the information provided by the physical, material senses. In this way, a physically pretty woman can appear quite dull and ordinary if she's fed no lively sense of beauty to her own soul, and a physically ordinary woman can appear captivating if she's cultivated her soul with images and feelings of worth and wonder.

How Noticing Can Bring You to Letting Go

So it's helpful, in the project of making my soul into something vast and wonderfully magnetic, to start by noticing where I am hobbling myself and making myself small through resentments. What persons, what groups, what institutions anger me or rouse my spite? Who do I find myself willing to insult? How do I feel that these others are defining me, limiting me, controlling me?

After I can identify who and how and what I resent, I can begin the process of becoming completely willing to entirely forgive the slights and insults I've perceived. It's only through entire forgiveness that I can shed my identity as a limited, rejected, put-upon person. Until I shed that identity, it lives on in my soul and designs what is possible for me. Because the soul is creative, as long as my soul holds an image of me as a rejected, hurt person, I will continue to be drawn to situations where I

will be rejected and hurt.

One way to practice entire forgiveness is to pretend that I had never played the “I am who they say I am” game at all. I can do this by envisioning that I came into this world feeling fabulous about myself in all respects, with no input required from anyone else to maintain that feeling and no input from anyone else capable of taking that feeling away. I imagine what it would have been like to go through life with this buoyant feeling of fabulousness. I see myself as always having a morphic field just buzzing with this feeling, a field that others sense and respond to.

Seeing myself with a different morphic field in the past is key to changing my morphic resonance in the present. As I “remember” feeling wonderful about myself in the past, I also “remember” others being irresistibly drawn to the positive hum of my field and feeling wonderful about me too.

I become completely willing to have all memories of failure, disappointment, shame, and lack struck from my being, my soul, my field. I understand that those painful memories aren’t facts to be cherished, they’re just the tender and dangerous traces of my previous confusion, my previous attachment to the “I am who they say I am” game.

I recognize that my painful memories aren’t precious touchstones of truth that reveal my essential nature as someone who’s not good enough—instead they’re senseless and accidental wounds that tell me nothing essential about who I am. They need to be cleaned and allowed to heal through entire forgiveness, not left open and festering.

All of this requires having a fluid attitude about memory that shocks some people. When I speak about entire forgiveness, some folks think I’m talking about denial of the past or wishful thinking. But I’m not talking about denial of the past—I’m talking about what’s necessary for deep healing of our energetic fields. The past happened as it happened. We can’t change it. Yet our own memories are *not* the past. They are energetic traces of the past that we carry with us, traces that have a potent effect on our morphic fields *today* and therefore a lingering creative impact on our current and future experience.

The Crucial Importance of Imprinting New Memories in Our Morphic Fields

It's important to fully acknowledge and own what happened in the past, to never lie to oneself.

And then it's important to free ourselves from the energetic remnants of that past by engraving into our beings new "memories" that are supportive of the expanded identities and abilities we now wish our souls to create for us. We achieve this engraving just by practicing "remembering" the past differently, again and again, as many times as it takes for us to begin feeling different about ourselves in the present.

This practice of creating new memories for oneself, simple as it is, is incredibly potent. Many new-age teachers advocate creating positive visions of our future in order to change our experience. A positive vision of the future is helpful and very important, but it's not sufficient in order to create a deep alteration in the morphic field of electromagnetic energy all around us, which governs how we grow, how we feel, how we perceive, and which powerfully affects how others perceive and respond to us.

Visions of the future aren't enough to effect this change, because this electromagnetic field is our own soul in physical manifestation, and the soul is made of memory, personal and collective. In order to make the soul into something more evolved and free, we need to work with it at the level of personal and collective memory (myth, folktale, and fairy tale).

Evolving the soul at the level of collective memory involves undertaking the mythic journey, which we are doing here through our experiments. To evolve the soul at the level of personal memory is somewhat more simple—it requires the radical and ongoing practice of entire forgiveness and faith.

The practice of entire forgiveness at the personal level cleanses and prepares one to undergo deeper and deeper stages of the mythic journey.

Action

Every day for a week after your session of metta cultivation, take some time to do the following exercise in engraving new memories.

Pretend you never had a doubt in your mind about how lovable, powerful, and wonderful you are. Imagine that from the time you were very young, everyone around you responded to this radiant knowledge and treated you with celebration and deep respect. See yourself always feeling good and pleasantly excited about whatever you attempted to do, accomplish, or create. See yourself never in the least affected by the objective success or nonsuccess of your endeavors. Remember yourself always abiding in a full and delightful feeling of rich success, no matter the particular outcome of whatever you did.

You may find it helps you to then record the following decisions in your common-place book:

I decide to drop all my old memories of pain, lack, and shame. I decide to entirely forgive all those old memories, to let them be completely erased from my being, from my field. I give up all ability to access them. I don't need them to tell me who I am. The truth about me is not contained or revealed in those memories, only a record of my previous confusion. I am no longer confused, and I no longer need or want those traces. They serve no purpose but to keep me trapped in the same patterns.

I no longer want those patterns, that identity. I am willing to completely forgive those memories by completely dropping them. I am willing to never remember myself again as someone insulted, scorned, hurt, or disappointed. I am willing to remember myself as someone who has only ever felt welcomed, cherished, loved, successful, and celebrated. I am willing to release all of my old resentments and anger. I am willing to have nothing in my heart but kindness, gratitude, and love.

Check-Ins

Write your responses to these questions in your common-place book.

1. How do you feel after you practice metta cultivation? Do you notice

yourself feeling any different toward people after you've practiced?

2. Read back over your recollections of dreams from this past week. Do you see any common themes? Does any particular person reappear? What has the feeling tone of your dreams been this past week? Oftentimes, as we experiment with taking symbolic action based on our heart's call, our dreams become stranger and more intense. These intensities can propel us forward and suggest additional symbolic actions. What might your dreams be asking you to do?
3. What, of all the things your heart has asked of you, do you most resist attempting to do in the world? What seems the most silly and useless to you? Consider that perhaps that very thing may be the most important thing you can do, the long-ignored key to ending your suffering, because what seems least important to our conscious mind can be most important to our soul's unfolding. Make it your highest priority to accomplish the most futile symbolic action suggested by your heart.

STEP THREE

Meeting Your Guide

Having stepped outside the bounds of your socially defined identity by accepting and starting to act upon your own heart's call, you may find yourself beginning to see meaningful patterns and connections everywhere. Just the awareness of meaning where previously you saw only randomness and nothingness can be a mighty ease to your suffering.

Synchronicity

Since you're no longer rigidly holding to the habitual definitions that previously fed your soul a limited story, and that created for you a predictable experience, you are now open to perceiving a richer level of patterning. Through the people and events in your life, you'll receive invitations to see how consciousness evolves itself through form.

Since you've begun to take the symbolic actions your heart suggested to you, you now have fully given to yourself the eyes to see and ears to hear the symbolic significance of people, places, animals, and objects in your life that were previously veiled to you as long as you persisted in following the rationalist, materialist superstitions of our culture. Your journeying on this path renders you symbolically sensitive.

Now that you've decisively shed those materialist superstitions, you're in a much better position to perceive the synchronicity that surrounds you. Synchronicity is an observed correlation between "interior" and

“exterior” events, and it has a way of powerfully revealing the truth that inner and outer are actually one. Through this revealing, we see that the evolution of our individual selves is intimately bound up with the evolution of the whole dream of the world. The personal and collective dreams are working in concordance with one another—they’re synchronized. Synchronized by what? By the energetic field, or soul, which surrounds, pervades, organizes, and creates everything. As we work with that field in our journey on the poet’s path, synchronicities speed up. We see more and more potent coincidences. Synchronicities demonstrate that the soulmaking process is working, and when sensitively read, they suggest further actions for us to take that will bring us into deeper harmony with the collective evolution and thus make our own trip maximally fruitful.

Matter, the stuff of our shared dream, always dissolves and falls away. The individual cells that make up your body today will all be dead and gone in seven years, even if you are still alive. The individual cells will be gone, but the pattern, the shape of you, will still be present. Patterns, or ideas, persist. These patterns are memories in the morphic field, and they continue repeating, even as the stuff that fills them in always changes and shifts. It’s at the level of the patterns, at the level of ideas, that everything evolves, that it extends in depth and complexity.

As long as you are identified with the socially constructed pattern assigned to you, you’re not able to perceive the divine patterns in operation all around you—you can see only what your social conditioning guides you to see. But when you see that you are *not* the pattern socially assigned to you, when you refuse that assignment and start to act on the strange call of your heart, then you begin to see the divine pattern that you *really* are, and to notice that a trait of your divine patterning is the ability to participate consciously in directing the evolution of your pattern and all other patterns. This is what it means to be “made in the image of God.” To be made in the image of God means to be made in the pattern of God, and God is a pattern that consciously generates the evolution of all patterns to greater and greater depth, complexity, and interconnection.

Interacting with Symbols to Find Your Myth

As you become more aware of the patterns underlying all things, you start to notice that they are always speaking to you in whatever symbolic language you have the easiest access to, urging you to play a role in their evolution.

This is because the whole world is a dream that we're all dreaming. It's up to us as individuals to choose how deeply and with how much awareness and love we dream it together.

As you see the patterns and meaning emerge in your own personal experience of the world dream, you begin to realize that everything is happening on your behalf, even the obstacles and the challenges that you experiment with. The obstacles and challenges that you find are there to dare you to become vast and wise enough to surmount them. At this stage, it helps to ask yourself: What is the myth that I'm living? And what must I do to live it well?

As you become willing to see your life as a myth, you will pick up on themes and motifs that shout out to you and allow you to see that persons and situations in your life who appear to be sources of temptation or frustration are actually guides who want something from you much different from what you initially imagined.

How do you know that you're meeting a guide? There will be conspicuous signs that tip you off, names and symbols present that are personally meaningful to you. Don't worry that the universe will speak to you in a language you can't understand—this won't happen. The outer corresponds with the inner—the universe knows who you are and what language you speak, what stories you know, what characters and dramas will register as significant to your psyche.

In order to succeed as an adventurer on this path, you need to confront your guides honestly and directly, with compassion and the willingness to be of service. Seek to know what they truly want from you (which is likely to be something much different from what you first assume), and seek to give it to them wholly and without reservation. As you do this, you'll win the favor, protection, and service of your guides—all things that you need in order to complete your quest.

Learning from Goethe's Faust

We can gain some insight into what it takes to relate properly to our guides by looking at an example of what *not* to do, taken from Johannes Goethe's famous tragic play *Faust*. Faust's story reveals what happens when a man starts out on the poet's path by removing himself from social limits and conditioning but then fails to align himself with the spiritual principles of reverence, honesty, love, and compassionate service necessary to evolve his soul into greatness. Faust is brave enough to dabble in magic and to refuse to be limited by the opinions of the crowd, but he is not brave enough to deal rightly with the potent forces he thus summons.

Faust is a doctor who's grown tired of all his human and scientific knowledge. He calls out for some spirit to appear and give him a mantle that would let him travel freely to new scenes of pleasure. Shortly thereafter he experiments a guide, Mephistopheles, who first appears to him in the form of a large black dog, which he takes home to his study. The dog overhears Faust endeavoring to translate the opening lines of the Gospel of John in a fashion that would better suit himself. Faust isn't content with the translation, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God"—he wishes to translate the Gospel to say, "In the beginning was the Deed." The fact of Faust's discontent with the common translation of the Gospel of John hints that he's unable to accept the true vocation of the poet, which is to uncover and creatively cooperate with the divine pattern, or Word, underlying all life.

Upon hearing Faust's presumptuous new translation, Mephistopheles changes form and shows himself in a human guise, dressed as a traveling scholar. When Faust asks him who he is, Mephistopheles mocks Faust for not respecting the primacy of "the Word" while still caring about names, and then tells him that he is "A portion of that power, / Whose wills are evil, but whose actions good"—in other words, that he's a servant of the destructive force. Mephistopheles asks Faust's permission to leave, but Faust greedily tries to trap Mephistopheles in order to use him for his own benefit. This covetous and unkind action lets Mephistopheles know that Faust's principles are weak and that he's ripe to be tempted.

Mephistopheles offers to give Faust what he first heard him wish for—

free travel throughout the world. Despairing, Faust declines the offer, arguing that even the most pleasurable travel couldn't distract him from the fact that he's a limited human in a world where God is apparently unresponsive and all happiness is fleeting. Faust claims that he's so aware of the emptiness of worldly pleasures that nothing, no matter how grand or how sweet, could make him forget for a moment the barrenness of his existence. He curses all love, hope, and faith. He avows that he doesn't care what might happen after death, it's earthly life that's oppressing him—and so he offers to enslave his immortal soul to Mephistopheles's use if Mephistopheles can show him “one short throb of pleasure” on earth that would absorb him for a moment and let him forget the emptiness that seems so apparent. Faust thus expresses a very dangerous form of despair, a despair that is partly wise, because it's alert to the dissolution of all form, and yet very foolish, because it refuses to acknowledge or seek harmony with the deeper patterns underlying that dissolution.

Mephistopheles ends up leading Faust on a journey in which Faust seduces a young girl and leads her to suicide and murder. As Goethe tells the story, Faust finally finds redemption, but not until he's suffered much and come to a point of total disgust with himself.

What would have happened if, rather than trying to trap and use Mephistopheles, Faust had met him with respect and with an honest desire to help him?

Honesty Leads to Creativity and Awesoming

Honesty is not just refraining from deliberate lies, it's the positive act of living in accordance with the deepest truth you can discover. Oftentimes religions and various spiritual and philosophical traditions contain articulations of deep truth that can be inspiring or powerful reminders of our deepest truth, but ultimately we're not honest unless the deep truth we live from is our own. In other words, to live in accord with truth doesn't mean living in accord with any dogma, unless that dogma resonates with you as so full and accurate an expression of your own truth that you feel fully encompassed and understood in it.

It stands to reason, then, that in order to become honest we need to seek truth. How to do that? How to seek something when we don't yet know what we're looking for? I can look for a blue cup in my cupboard because I know what the blue cup looks like—but if I knew what the truth looked like, I wouldn't have to search for it, right? I'd know it already!

In a sense, we *do* already know the truth. The truth is already in us, whole. But it lives in us in a fairly quiet and subtle form that has been much overlaid throughout our lives by the babble and lies of the mad world. What I mean by this is that we might not know what the truth looks like, but we know what it *feels* like when we encounter it.

We have this faculty of recognizing truth when we meet it, because we partake of the soul. Ralph Waldo Emerson offered that “the soul is the perceiver and revealer of truth.” The senses of the soul are not identical with the five physical senses, they're more subtle. So when we encounter truth, we have subtle sensations that we can miss unless we're open and attentive.

We can become open and attentive through soulmaking. In an important sense, soulmaking is just the creative seeking and expression of extrarational truth. It's what we do when we dialogue with the parts of ourselves that usually go unheard—whether it be our heart, our guides, or our genius. By extrarational truth, I mean truth that cannot be arrived at or communicated through reason and argument, but only grasped intuitively and communicated via experiential resources like ritual and dance, poetry and music, parties and drama, embraces and aromas.

Essentially, making the soul is the process of awakening your genius. An awakened life teeming with joy and connection is the result of creatively seeking and expressing truth—whether that expression comes through throwing a great party, singing a song, or writing a story doesn't matter.

What about Miserable Artists?

We might become suspicious of the notion that creative seeking and

expression of truth can awesome our lives when we notice that many artists and poets in modern times have made wonderful objects without making wonderful lives for themselves and others. I offer that this disconnection between the beauty of artworks and the beauty of the lives lived by their creators stems from a widespread cultural failure to understand that the real purpose of the human creative capacity, and therefore of art, is not to make pretty or interesting or entertaining things, but rather to heal and to nourish, to bring us into meaning, union, and depth.

The purpose of art isn't to shock or dishearten, to impress, to decorate, to mimic, or to reflect—but we've taken our creative capacity and used it toward those desolate ends, because we've accepted a very deep lie without question. The lie is this: that we're separate from the power that animates the universe, that we're separate from love. The assumption flows from this premise that since we're detached from love, we can't know truth without reason or dogma to guide us. This assumption leads us to believe that our creative intuition can be used only for entertainment, reflection, and self-aggrandizement, not for revelation of real power. But revelation is the best fruit of our creative faculty.

The creative capacity can bring forth truth through any medium, and at multiple levels of experience. A well-designed and presented meal can plumb the depths of the mellow wistfulness of fall just as well as Keats's "To Autumn."

Through what we make and what we do, we are always answering the questions "What is true?" "Who am I?" and "What is this world?" Perhaps the most basic and intimate of these questions is "Who am I?"

What we may not realize is that through our creative capacity we have the ability to make an answer to "Who am I?" that is much fuller, richer, happier, and more wondrous than the answers our culture and family have given us. And as we answer "Who am I?" by uncovering and bringing forth more expansive and lively truth about who we are, we gradually become capable of enriching the world around us ever more positively with our gifts.

I suggest to you the radical notion that truth always feels good. It may not feel good to our egos—it can be quite stinging to our shallow, mind-constructed selves—but it will always feel good, always relieving and brightening, to our hearts. To distinguish between what feels good to our

ego and what feels good to our hearts can take some practice and attention, but it's really not that difficult to learn.

The ego can be made to feel good with falseness and flattery, with apparent success in its efforts to garner external boons—and these good feelings have a disorienting wooshy, wobbly, intoxicating flavor. The heart can only be made to feel good with truth, and these good feelings have a grounding, deepening, sobering, and awakening flavor. What is true will always feel like expansion and freedom rather than contraction and stress. You can know that you're believing something false if you feel uptight and worried, trapped and scared. Real truth always, always sets us free and opens us up to greater joy.

Most all the difficulties in our lives, all the complications and addictions, the grasping and seeking, come from a dearth of honesty. As children, we inherit the fundamental lie that all our caregivers have believed about themselves to some degree (unless they're quite enlightened): that there is something wrong with us, that we are not one with love and one with all, that we do not naturally deserve all gifts.

The acceptance of this lie causes us pain (because lies always hurt, and truth always feels like gorgeous freedom), and as we grow up, we seek solutions to our pain in the form of external security, pleasure, approval, prestige, and power. We value these external boons because they seem to provide “evidence” to our reasoning minds that we are indeed okay, valuable, loved, and wanted by the world.

The Problem with Proving the Gift World

In essence, we are frantically trying to *prove* to our reason that the gift world exists. We subconsciously think, “If only I can get enough money, enough sex, enough safety, enough respect, then that will prove that the gift world is real, and then I can really relax.” We think we need evidence and proof that the world is abundant and welcoming to us because we have accepted the lie that we are separate from all that is, and therefore need reason or evidence to provide us with truth—we believe we don't have direct access to truth via our intuition, our subtle senses. Only when we accept this lie do we become obsessed with

evidence. We confuse ourselves, believing that evidence is the master of truth when really evidence is only the servant of truth.

We do our best to gather the good things of this world to us and thereby to prove to ourselves the reality of the gift world, because we sense deep down that we can only relax and be truly free if the gift world is real. But no amount of money, respect, pleasure, or prestige will ever prove the gift world to us.

A nagging voice will always have some skepticism as long as we are aiming for proof, and this voice's skepticism will be justified. It will say, "Oh, but what I have doesn't prove that the world is gracious and bountiful, because I have worked for all of it—I schemed and earned, manipulated and controlled, planned and sometimes even forced—to get what I have. This means it wasn't a gift, and I need to keep scheming and controlling, working and forcing, in order to have anything and be okay."

And so our own attempts to prove the gift world to ourselves end up making us feel poor, anxious, on guard. We can't relax into joy, love, and wonder. We have to stay uptight, continually seeking. Without knowledge of the gift world, we're not truly able to enjoy or inhabit any bounty we accumulate. We become bored and depressed, isolated and numb.

What I suggest to you is to stop trying to prove to yourself the reality of the world of bounty and ease and love. Stop trying to get enough respect, pleasure, security to prove that the universe is friendly. The gift world runs from attempts to reason and prove, because it's pure love, which is pure faith, which is entirely subjective—and attempts to prove are invasive, analytic, insisting on objectivity and seeking to avoid the fundamental responsibility of choice.

We want evidence to prove things objectively true for us in an objective world, because then the burden of discerning and living the truth seems to be removed from us. Objectivity seems to remove from us the work of discerning what is true, because it puts reality outside of us. When we imagine reality to stand apart from us, we think we are not responsible for what we experience within it. This evasion is successful in one sense, because by objectifying the world we can better manipulate its material elements. We can see this in all our use of science and technology. Manipulation is facilitated by objectification: the scientific

method, which seeks evidence for theories, objectifies the world. But manipulation can never bring forth the gift world, can never make the soul, can never bring us into love—and that's all we truly want.

Experiment 3: Meeting Your Guide

Identify a character in your waking life or in your dreams who deeply attracts or repulses you. (If you're extroverted, it's likely that your guide figure will be represented by someone in your waking life—if you're introverted, it's likely that your guide figure will be someone who appears in your nighttime dreams or daydreams).

Assume that you feel the way you do about that character because they possess qualities that in some sense are your own, which you haven't yet accepted. These qualities are the magical protections, or amulets, that you need in order to continue your journey into ecstatic bliss. The person in your waking life or dreams who deeply attracts or repulses you is a guide figure who, when properly engaged with, can lead you up to the threshold of adventure and give you the magical protections (the inner qualities) you need to succeed.

In your common-place book, create an imaginary dialogue with your guide using dreampeak. In writing, imaginatively confront the guide and tell her how you honestly feel about her. Ask her what she wants from you or has to show you, and why she behaves the way she does toward you. In writing, record the reply you inwardly "hear" from her. Respond to her reply as sincerely and openly as if you were having a conversation with another present being. Deliberately give your guide permission to speak through your mind and to use your hand to write. You may find that she has acute observations to offer you about your own behavior and outlook. Open up to the fullest love within you, and express a sincere desire to help and heal your guide—then listen to what she says in response. Continue in this way until you feel you've discovered something about her perception of you that you did not previously understand.

Now, allow your guide to ask you questions about your perceptions of her and what you need from her. Questions she might ask include: Is

that really the case? Are you sure? How do you feel when you think that about me? How do you treat me when you think that? How do you treat yourself? What would it be like for you to not have that story about me?

Create Your Amulet

Read back through your dialogue with your guide. What has happened? What have you learned from this dialogue? What amulet, or inner quality, did your guide give you for your journey?

Make an actual representation of this amulet, and throughout the coming weeks, wear it. The amulet could take the form of a bracelet or necklace, a drawing on the skin with paint, or a design on a handbag. The important thing is that you create it and wear it every day.

How can you apply the qualities that the amulet represents to your actual life situation now? Do you need to stand up to someone? Tell an uncomfortable truth? Do this.

Example Dialogue with a Guide

What follows is the written dialogue I had with a guide on the third week of my journey through these experiments. The inspiration for the guide figure was a flirtatious and playful character in my nighttime dreams.

I recognized that this character, though attractive to me, bore disturbing resemblances to men from previous romantic adventures in my waking life who had heavily hurt me. This clue led me to suspect that the dream character represented not just a man to me, but a guide. In my dialogue, I addressed him not so much as an individual human but as this archetype I had encountered previously, a constellation of men I'd known in waking life and in my dreams.

Me: What the hell?

Him: You feel angry at me that I'm here.

M: Yes I feel angry. This attraction disturbs me.

H: You think you would be degraded by being with me.

M: I know I would; you play tricks. You've confused me and hurt me so many times in the past. You always end up rejecting me anyway, so why don't you just leave me alone?

H: I have something to show you. I'm drawn to you too. It's not as if I don't suffer in this dance.

M: Ha! You feel far less than I do; you take everything lightly.

H: So it seems to you. I'm hungry—you look beautiful. You fascinate me. That's serious, isn't it?

M: That doesn't explain why you're drawn to me. Prettier women exist.

H: You have power, incredible power.

M: What does that even mean?

H: It means you could kill me. That's how I feel power, as the threat of death. It's sublimity. You have sublime power.

M: Thank you, that flatters me and it also sounds meaningless. Please be more sensible—be articulate as you can, speak through me as much as you need. I want to understand what you say, what you have to show me. I want to meet you and help you, genuinely.

H: Come to me. I'll give you every sensation you ever wanted.

M: No. Your offer doesn't help. It won't fundamentally change me, alter me, lead me into ongoing ecstatic realization. I've had enough of that game. It has no worth for me, because it doesn't fundamentally evolve me. It's just an intoxication; it's temporary.

H: You hate me. You don't like me. You don't respect me. You think I'm frivolous and not a real man.

M: What? You want my respect now, and not really my eros?

H: I know how to get your eros. I don't know how to get your respect. You think I live as a foolish little boy who plays pretend with toys, as a joke and a weakling.

M: Why do you want my respect?

H: Because you have power; you could kill me.

M: How would my respect change you?

H: It would free me of having to “make something” of myself. It would free me of having to prove myself and charm you and seduce you. It would free me from having to impress and trick you.

M: If you want my *respect*, why don’t you just ask for it? Why flirt with me and pretend like you want my love when you don’t even really want it?

H: I don’t know. I’m just trying to get your attention somehow. You have a fixation with love, so I guess I offer love. You have such derision, such disrespect, for the play that I devote myself to, for the games and the mystery—even though it charms you, you think it has no worth, it has no practicality, it doesn’t support your security.

M: Yes.

H: So see it as totally practical. See that my play supports your deeper security, the security of fun and beauty and joy alive in the world. See that my frivolity and imagination is supportive of you too. Be thankful to me for that, without being ashamed or titillated. Don’t just be charmed by me. Give me real respect. Give it as a free gift, without guilt. Your respect can heal me, make me whole. Your love and desire can’t. And don’t insult or think less of me, please, for needing your respect. Be compassionate. Don’t reject me just because I can’t support your practical, material needs and your need for deep love. See me as very worthwhile and valuable to you, to the world, to the community—even though the world will never recognize my value economically.

M: Anything else?

H: Don’t make me feel as if I can have more of your attention and respect if I please you. Don’t be bemused by me or embarrassed by me. Just admit you respect me fully and deeply. Just give gratitude to me that I do the work that I do and see it as an important contribution. Don’t deride me. If I can just see that you wholeheartedly respect me and accept me, then I can stop trying to charm you.

Accept that you’re the kind of person who truly embraces the playful, the impractical, the stuff the security money world rejects.

Respect me for real as a shaman, a mediator, an artist, a poet, a healer. Give me the respect society won't quite give me. Betray society, betray the money culture and the sensible culture, and then you won't have to betray yourself by letting me seduce you.

Don't condescend to me; don't belittle me.

Do you really think it's true that what I do is ridiculous and silly for a grown man?

M: No.

H: How do you react when you're believing that what I do is ridiculous, embarrassing, weak?

M: I feel closed up, snide, ironical, cynical, superior, and smug. I feel supported by society and safe, in that I feel society is on my side in being against you. A part of me wants to see you punished and hurt for your silliness. I feel attracted to you—ashamed of you and attracted all at once.

H: How do you treat me when you think that what I do is foolish and ridiculous?

M: I flirt with you. I say overly solicitous things. I trivialize you; I make you an object of fantasy. I don't see your real struggle or feelings. I have no real interest in helping you. I want to use you and get energy from you.

H: How do you treat yourself when you believe what I do is ridiculous or silly?

M: I don't do fun stuff. I'm suffering. I'm not really comfortable with the silly and ridiculous side of myself. I'm trying to get society's approval, to be seen as sane and cool and "with it." I don't want to be seen as dorky.

H: When did you first see me as silly and ridiculous?

M: When I realized that you couldn't give me the material things I wanted. That your power was in the symbolic and imaginal world and not in the concrete.

H: What do you fear would happen if you didn't see me as ridiculous?

M: I would lose all perspective. I'd become a Renaissance Faire groupie and a larper. I'd be socially outcast. I'd be really uncool. I would be

less able to agree and get along with the culture at large.

H: Who would you be without your story that what I do is ridiculous and not appropriate for a grown man?

M: I'd have an expanded appreciation for the world and human actions that go beyond the messed up value system and economy of the present time. I'd be in a more magical, charged world where symbolic acts have more real consequence. I wouldn't be coming from the closed place. I'd be more individuated, present, conscious.

H: So what do you really think of me?

M: Your play is practical, important, crucial, real, deserving of deep reward, extremely valuable. It's indispensable to our well-being; it's greatly supportive of me and everyone else. It's completely valid and appropriate for a real man. And I give you gratitude for it.

H: Now this is what I want you to do: tell yourself those same things about the magical things you do, the things that you think don't matter and that no one cares about, the things that you're always trying to push away because you can see no way to let them help you become a "real" artist or writer. Say it.

M: My role play, my poetry, my magic rituals, my parties, my storytelling, and dress-up are practical, important, crucial, real, deserving of deep reward, and extremely valuable. It's indispensable to our well-being; it's greatly supportive of me and you and everyone else. It's completely valid and appropriate for a grown woman, a real woman. And I give myself gratitude for it.

H: Yes—you've got it now; you've got the amulet.

By imaginatively meeting with my guide and then applying what I had learned from my meeting with him (respect for myself and respect for the playful principle) to my actual relationships in the world, I gained a deep insight that would help me at later moments in my journey when I felt prone to doubt or disrespect the power of my own playfulness.

Check-Ins

Write your responses to these questions in your common-place book.

1. Are you making notes in your common-place book about things you're reading, viewing, contemplating? If not—why? Sometimes we resist writing or note-taking because we tell ourselves that what we think isn't really "that important." What if that was a giant falsehood of the mad world? What if your thoughts and intuitions were terribly important? I offer that the thoughts we record in our common-place book may not always make sense to us later, but they always add heat to mix. In order to make the alchemy of genius happen, we need to reach a certain mass of raw material. The more raw material we gather, the hotter the pile gets—like a heap of compost. So even if your thoughts and notions seem like throwaways to you, try writing them down. You might find that they have a way of contributing to your transformation, humble though they may seem.
2. Have you begun to resist or forget to do your metta cultivation yet? If so, reflect on why you're letting it slide. Refuse to accept the idea that you're just lazy. Instead, consider: it's scary to realize how loving you really are, how much joy you can take in envisioning other people's joy. Coming into this realization can feel destabilizing. Is this happening for you? What can you do to give yourself a sense of groundedness?
3. Was it difficult choosing someone you felt might be a guide figure for you? Remember that it's possible to encounter multiple guides on our journey through life. If it seemed like no one in particular stood out to you as a potential guide figure, that could mean that either your guide is a dream figure you haven't noticed yet, or that you have multiple guides. Try doing the dialogue experiment with other potential guide figures until you are able to find one who shows you something you hadn't previously realized.

STEP FOUR

Crossing the Threshold

Armed with amulets from our guide, we've now arrived at the gates of the threshold into the underworld of the unconscious, an underworld that we've already been drawing close to us through our symbolic enactment in the world of duties that our heart gave to us. In order to deal with this underworld, we need to cultivate intense optimism that by taking this journey, we will bring ourselves to ecstatic wholeness. What we need is not lazy optimism of the "Oh, whatever, yeah, that could happen" variety. We require balls-to-the-wall, hoping-with-all-my-heart, completely exposed and vulnerable optimism.

Throbbing, Extrarational Optimism

I call the thing we need throbbing optimism, because when you're really doing it your whole body pulses with energy. I call this kind of optimism extrarational because it bypasses the reasoning mind. The reasoning mind only knows what was true in the past, and makes deductions based on that. It says that any hope that something truly different and way better could happen is "irrational." Well, I say it is *not* "irrational"—it is *extrarational*. It exceeds reason. It exceeds the known. It's willing to accept the unknown—and that unknown is superneat.

Practicing throbbing optimism isn't just all gumballs and lollipops. There's some real virtue and depth to it, also. In fact, to deepen your practice of honesty, optimism is required. Without optimism, honesty

can be overcome by the untruth of pessimism based on apparent evidence. For example, after the heroin addict takes the first of the twelve steps of recovery and admits that her life has become unmanageable and that she's powerless over her addiction (a nakedly honest action), she has a brief reprieve from having to use drugs. If in that time she can take the second step, coming to believe that a higher power could restore her to sanity—then she can stay clean long enough to arrive at step three and subsequently step four—a fearless and searching moral inventory, another rich practice of honesty. If, however, she cannot manage to take that second step, then she will go back to using drugs. She won't believe that a greater solution to her real problem is possible, and so she'll go back to the solutions that are familiar—getting high and manipulating circumstances. Without the optimism of the second step, the honesty of the first step is quickly forgotten. If a person has no hope that another way of life is possible, she'll invent rationalizations to allow her to go back to her old way of life. She may think to herself, "Look at my life—it's in shambles. A higher power hasn't helped me so far—why should it help me now? Yes I'm powerless and my life is unmanageable, but that's just how it is—it can't get any better." If the addict thinks this way, she'll go and get high again.

For the heroin addict, coming to believe that a higher power can restore her to sanity is a work of optimism unlike any she may have practiced before. In coming to believe, she is finally holding optimism for a larger solution, an optimism made possible because in the first step she finally admitted to having a larger problem than her denial previously allowed her to acknowledge—she admits the total unmanageability of her life and her powerlessness over her addiction. This admission, because it is profoundly true, sweeps away all her other stories about why her life wasn't working: "I just don't have enough money for the drugs I want—I need to figure out a way to get more money," "These people are crazy, as soon as I get away from these people I'll be fine," "If only he loved me more, I wouldn't need to get high." As long as she holds those stories about why her life wasn't working, the heroin addict is forced to try to seek solutions to those problems—to get more money, to change friends, to make the guy love her. She may be optimistic about her odds of achieving any of these ends, but those varieties of optimism are false and don't truly serve her.

It's only when she's able to honestly accept and admit the full extent of her problem with addiction that the possibility arises for her to be genuinely optimistic, to believe that a *real* solution to her *real* problem is possible.

How Far You've Come with Honesty in Your Optimism

At this point, you've been honest enough with yourself to admit that what you truly want is the gift world—an experience of life in which you powerfully embody your own genius, and all that you require for enormous happiness flows to you effortlessly and synchronously, giving you the freedom to offer forth your love and talents without impediment.

You've admitted that no amount of success in the mad world can fulfill you. By doing this, you've removed your need for rationalization, denial, and the false optimism of "if only" that sustained you in the mad world—"If only this next project is a big hit, I can be happy," "If only I could find a great job, then I'd feel secure"—these "if onlys" are every bit as destructive and limiting as that of the drug addict's, only in less acute, and therefore less visible, form. They're still chronically damaging.

When you admit that you don't want the mad world and that it can't fulfill you, for the first time you're admitting the actual magnitude of your problem: your problem isn't just that you don't have enough money or enough success, it's that you've been addicted to the mad world, compulsively chasing its dangled rewards and ignoring your true needs and desires in the process. Yet now that you've admitted the real magnitude of the problem, you're open to the real magnitude of the solution.

Your admission has taken you into a sensitive liminal experience in which synchronicities and omens are beginning to pick up. In order to see this synchronous momentum increase and through it to arrive in the gift world, it's important to follow your wholehearted admission of what

you truly want with an equally whole-hearted optimism that what you truly want *can* and *will* come.

Optimism has a bad reputation as something foolish or weak. It indeed is something foolish when it is not powerfully yoked to honesty. False optimism can lead us to persist in pursuing solutions to our pain that are actually destructive rather than healing. Real optimism, though, can lead us to evolve our experience of life into a different register of consciousness, a register where nothing needs to be as difficult as we once thought.

Practicing optimism for the gift world gives us the freedom to stop pursuing our old destructive solutions and to let go of our attachment to apparent control.

How would you feel if you allowed yourself to simply know, beyond all doubt, that within a year your consciousness would be totally transformed, you'd be living in a condition of resounding love-bliss, your creativity and wisdom would be pouring forth like a frothing fountain, you'd be fully gifted with much more bounty than you need to be happy, you'd have blossoming and ever-richening relationships, you'd be experiencing radical, riotous surprise-presents from the universe with astonishing regularity?

Seriously—what if you *knew* that scenario would be your reality in a year? You'd probably become less uptight right now. You'd stop stressing so much over whether everything is happening in your life today just the way you want it to happen. You might feel really relieved. You could let go of working so hard to make the world conform to your various demands for security, prestige, pleasure—you could let go not out of some kind of saintly self-denial but out of the bare knowledge that in a matter of months you'd be fully satisfied on all fronts, no striving required. Maybe you would give yourself a break from all the forms of worrying and neurotic fretting you do and just enjoy whatever's at hand to enjoy: the sunshine, your friend's face, your funny-looking toes.

You might stop frantically pursuing the success you think you need in order to be safe and respected. You might instead do things you like to do simply for the sake of doing them—making big pots of vegetable stew, having your friends over for a dress-up party, reading novels, petting dogs at the animal shelter. Knowing that the gift world is about to advent, you might just have a blast in your final months as a citizen of

the mad world.

You might offer love and tenderness to your anxiety and fear whenever they rear up, knowing that this might be the last time you meet with those old visitors. You might see yourself mechanically chasing some outcome that you expect will give you some lasting fulfillment—then catch yourself in the middle of the chase and just laugh as you go through those motions. You might begin to take everything a lot less seriously.

Believing in the Gift World and True Responsibility

This “taking yourself less seriously because you know the gift world is about to come” is not a form of irresponsibility. Responsibility means the ability to respond—the question, then, is what are you responding to? Are you responding to the endless attention-grabbing demands of the mad world and your mad ego that participates in it? Or are you responsible to the deep truth that you intuit in your heart, the truth that the gift world is already real spiritually and will soon become real materially through you—your actions and your consciousness?

To stop taking yourself so seriously is to be responsible to the deep truth. You may find that the people around you will not agree that you’re being responsible as you stop fulfilling the demands of the mad world and your mad ego. That’s because your lightening up, your responsibility to the deep truth in your heart, is a stirring call that troubles their own tightly maintained system of denial. People around you, people who love you and whom you love, might treat you with condescension or even concern as they see you letting go. It’s key not to react to those expressions with anything other than gratitude. Be grateful that your friends question you and think you’re crazy. There’s no need for you to be defensive, or to try to persuade them that you’re right. And just because you’re grateful to them doesn’t mean you need to continue speaking with them or seeing them if they just can’t support your evolution.

They have something in their own hearts that already knows the rightness of what you're doing—and when they are willing to hear their own hearts, they will see you and your path clearly. Until then, though, they're listening to the mad world and not to their deep truth, and they can only give you the mad world's messages: work harder, work longer, make sure you win, save for the future, keep yourself safe.

These messages have never made anyone's heart sing or provided anyone with a life that's vital and magnetically beautiful. They're the messages that lead to a life of flat staleness, hardness, ever more desperate attempts to control the uncontrollable and to depression. Whenever you hear such a message given to you, stop and ask yourself: is the person telling me this wildly joyous, expansively ecstatic, rich with benevolence, mischief, and bliss? Or is she hard and closed, dull and anxious, competitive or aggressive?

If you deeply reflect about the experience of the person giving you any message, you can see the usefulness of that message. Accepting the message will yield you the same result enjoyed by the messenger who, believing it herself, gives it to you. Do you want that same result?

Cultivating deep optimism that the gift world is coming has the effect of making you much more relaxed, open, present—in other words, someone who is much more receptive and attractive to gifts of all kinds. It's an optimism that allows us to let go, to surrender. It makes sense that we aren't able to let go of our fear and our control as long as we believe we need to get by in the mad world. We know that our fear and our attempts to control don't really improve our happiness, but we see no other option but to continue resorting to them until we're able to open our minds and hearts to our knowledge that the gift world is about to come to us in its full flesh-shaking resplendence.

Practicing Optimism: Listing What You Want

Let's work on getting closer to our best imagination of the gift world by getting in touch with what we want. Write "Stuff I Really, Really Want" at the top of a piece of paper and below it list twenty-five items, everything from grand abstract achievements to the most paltry of

household goods. Got it? Good, now if you have a mind whose automatic setting is anything like mine, you will now be thinking “I won’t do that, it’s pointless.”

My mind tells me it’s pointless to bring to the forefront of my mind all the things that I long for because, as it reports, “I won’t get them anyway.” This automatic setting of pessimism is a strategy I learned in childhood to protect myself from the wrenching disappointment of missing out on things I really, really wanted. The tough thing about pessimism, though, is that it doesn’t really protect me from disappointment. It just keeps me stuck in disappointing circumstances. It takes energy to evolve out of my present condition—and optimism generates energy.

Example List of Things One Desires

To provide a counterbalance to pessimism and thereby encourage you in coming up with your list of twenty-five things you desire, I figured I’d show you the list I wrote as I began writing this book in all its random, jumbled glory. Please keep in mind that I wrote this list before I had any clue that I would actually be able to get this book published.

1. A fireplace
2. A claw-foot bathtub
3. To publish an awesome self-help book
4. To record a freak-folk album
5. To perform a stand-up act
6. To be rich, having absolutely gazillions of gold coins to swim in, like Uncle McScrooge on *Duck Tales*
7. To be struck enlightened like Byron Katie and Eckhart Tolle
8. To be very, very glittery, like David Bowie circa the Ziggy Stardust era
9. To finish my PhD
10. To learn to play the guitar and write songs

11. A superflashy glam-rock wedding
12. New clothes for spring and summer
13. Speaking engagements around town
14. To make some videos for YouTube, like my friend Kevin, who is supercool
15. The Nobel Prize in Literature
16. A lot of rainbow-colored silk scarves
17. An awesome house in the woods somewhere, with giant fireplaces and claw-foot tubs
18. A pug puppy
19. My poetry books published
20. A mind-blowing flower garden
21. A gypsy caravan that is so rad I can hardly stand it
22. To make and sell incredibly beautiful tote bags
23. To write a brilliant, didactic novel like *The Alchemist*
24. To make meditation CDs/podcasts
25. A house that looks like a Lisa Frank sticker sheet exploded all over it, in a really good way (i.e., it looks like the Chelsea Hotel apartment of the artist Gerald de Cock)

Questioning Desire

After he read the above list and my ruminations on optimism and desire, my razor-sharp friend Tait McKenzie Johnson, author of The Absent Narrative blog and creator of the Unlimited Story Deck, raised a fantastic question to me: “Are desires necessarily a good thing to fulfill?” Just as I got started thinking about this, he went on to incisively outline the ways in which desiring can be potentially deleterious to the soul. He also noted that most of the things I listed as things I “really, really want” are material objects and offered his skepticism that material objects can really do all that much to promote happiness, observing that “there’s a

difference between having goals and wanting stuff.”

I fully agree. I think it’s incredibly important to release all of what the pioneering human-potential author Ken Keyes Jr. called “emotion-backed addictions”—otherwise known as demands to have things a certain way that cause us to get upset when things don’t turn out as we wanted. These demands have been called “desires” in certain contexts. Keyes advocated that we focus on “upleveling” all of our demands to “preferences.” I highly recommend that everyone on earth read all about it in his 1970s classic *The Handbook to Higher Consciousness*, which is invaluable wise. To me, Keyes’s distinction between demands and preferences is very important.

The Dance of Faith

To evolve your soul, you need to not only release your addictions to having things a certain way (i.e., surrender, let go) but also to fully embrace, hope for, and pursue the fulfillment of your preferences. As you might imagine, this is a bit of a difficult dance to do. Executed at its highest level, it’s what Kierkegaard called “the dance of faith” and elaborated in the brilliant treatise *Fear and Trembling*. According to Kierkegaard, one who executes the dance of faith may be called a “knight of faith” and is thereby distinguished from someone who succeeds in surrendering but is not also hoping for finite fulfillment—whom he calls a “knight of infinite resignation.”

Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* has such a scary title because it’s mostly about the adventures of one particular knight of faith, Abraham, who had a rough go of it, what with the Lord ordering him to sacrifice his only son Isaac and all. Kierkegaard uses the story of Abraham and Isaac to highlight the fact that in order to be a knight of faith, one must first fully and completely surrender (i.e., drop one’s addiction to having things a certain way).

Abraham had to completely surrender his very normal and natural attachment to not murdering his own son with his own hand. But according to Kierkegaard, Abraham didn’t stop there with his surrender—he also had an intense dose of throbbing optimism in which he trusted

that even though he was killing his own son, things would still turn out okay. Of course we all know that Abraham's faith was rewarded—an angel appeared and stopped him from killing Isaac at the last second. Whew!

So you see, there was a lot of fear and trembling in all of that.

But Kierkegaard also relates that there doesn't necessarily need to be a giant Old Testament tribulation in place for one to become a knight of faith, and he emphasizes that knights of faith are not apparent to the eye. They can be completely indistinguishable, in fact, from a sort of person that Kierkegaard quite loathed—materialistic philistines like me. Kierkegaard imagines a scenario in which he is introduced to an utterly ordinary-seeming person (“Good Lord! That person? Is it really he—why, he looks like a parishbeadle!”) who likes to eat and drink and putter around and hope passionately that his wife has prepared his favorite dish for dinner and yet who is not at all disappointed when he finds she has not—in short, who is actually a knight of faith.

I may not have my head quite wrapped around the whole Abraham-as-a-knight-of-faith thing, but I think I do grasp the philistine-as-a-knight-of-faith idea. It makes sense to me after having read Keyes's book and Byron Katie's book *A Thousand Names for Joy*.

In short, the philistine knight of faith is a person who has managed the amazing feat of fully surrendering attachment while also zestfully embracing and pursuing her preferences. This nonattached zestful pursuit has rather dazzling results. Witness Byron Katie, who is so nonattached to her continued earthly existence that she doesn't bat an eyelash when a dude holds a loaded gun to her belly and says “I'm going to kill you,” but who also surrounds herself with lovely stuff and has a wildly successful metaphysical self-help business with her partner, the brilliant translator Stephen Mitchell.

As Kierkegaard points out, knights of faith are rather rare. I myself am nowhere near that degree of profound surrender and simultaneous hope. I am, however, deeply involved in practicing its movements to the best of my ability.

I want to break down and explain for you exactly how this works, because I think it's an immensely valuable thing to be able to do. And, frankly, it is a little complicated and tough to explain and easy to misunderstand. It's also what I think is actually the way the whole law of

attraction thing works.

What to Do with That List of Desires

Now that you've created your list of desires, it's time to do some reflective work with it. By reflecting on what we want and discovering our feelings around wanting it, we gain important information about what inner obstacles in the form of attachments and demands we will have to overcome on our journey.

Notice Your Demands

Go through the list and make notes about what things on it you're especially attached or addicted to. In other words, what things on that list are you totally bummed and resentful that you don't currently have? For example, I am amazingly resentful that my poetry hasn't been published yet by any of the magazines or book contests I've sent it to.

It also continually bugs me that I do not have absolutely gazillions of gold coins to swim in, and that no one has yet seen fit to award my unpublished manuscripts of poetry the Nobel Prize in Literature. Of course, since if I had gazillions of gold coins to swim in, I would also have a house that looks like a Lisa Frank sticker sheet exploded all over it, in a really good way, and a gypsy caravan that is so rad I can hardly stand it, not to mention a pug puppy—it stands to reason that I am fairly resentful about my lack of these things as well.

And that resentment and attachment, friends, is not just something that pollutes my current life, it's also something which stands in the way of me actually attaining those desires or dreams in the future. Why? Because resentment and attachment create an inertia that affixes me to a negative and lacking self-image, drain me of energy, excite paralyzing fear, and cause me to grasp desperately at things that seem to offer what I truly desire but actually do not. It's bad juju. In other words, my resentment and attachment make me vulnerable to being self-deluded

and deluded by all the dazzling lies of our consumer culture. Which, as perhaps you've noticed, sucks.

Ask Yourself a Very Deep Question

The question is this: what among these things would I still like or much prefer to have, even if I felt a constant inner state of fulfillment, peace, and bliss?

This question can be helpful in discerning your authentic preferences from ones that are largely false and fear-driven attachments. After we've done this work of discernment, we can get down to the nitty-gritty of practicing surrender around the things that truly matter to us.

For example, if I were blissed out, I wouldn't really give a fig anymore about winning the Nobel Prize in Literature. Those Swedish snobs could kiss my enlightened ass. Noticing this clues me in that my desire for a Nobel Prize is a conditioned or false desire—not part of an intrinsic shape that my soul longs to blossom into but a side accessory to bolster my oft-faltering writerly ego.

However, if I was totally blissed out, I *would* still like a house that looks like a Lisa Frank sticker sheet exploded all over it, in a really good way, and a gypsy caravan that is so rad I can hardly stand it. Of course, I wouldn't *need* these things—I'd be blissed out! But I *would* like and prefer to have them—whereas all that Nobel Prize rigmarole would just be an annoyance.

Practice Virtualizing Your Authentic Preferences

Virtualization is a process in which you vividly imagine the fulfillment of your authentic preferences, drawing upon all five senses and upon your emotions. Let's say that I'm working on manifesting some roly-poly pigs. I would relax, lie back, and spend some time seeing myself hanging out in a pig pen, feel the soft squishing of the mud, hear the sweet grunts of porcine oinking, smell the fragrant shit, feel my heart swelling with

joy. Why do this?

Because in order to create a better world, you've got to imaginatively get the feel for what it would be like and impress that feeling upon your soul. This works because imagination, as my hero Ralph Waldo Emerson realized, is not just making stuff up. It's actually a kind of insight, or what Emerson called "a very high form of seeing." It feels like "making stuff up" at first because our imaginative light is dim to begin with.

As that light gets stronger and stronger, we begin to see that when we're imagining the fulfillment of our authentic preferences, we're actually not just making stuff up—we're perceiving a possible world, and the act of vividly perceiving it with our imagination draws it into physical manifestation, because our imagination communicates with our soul and our soul is creative. When practiced regularly (every day is best), virtualization alters your resonance.

It's important to remember that our preferences, even our authentic ones, are fluid, changeable things. Today I'm all about pug puppies. Tomorrow, I might be crazed for miniature pigs. Yesterday I wanted gold coins to swim in; today I think I'd prefer a chocolate river in which to wallow.

Now you might be thinking—hey there! You just got me all worked up about the arrival of my gypsy caravan. And now you're telling me that stuff doesn't matter? It's all "fluid"?

Yes and no. Yes, it's all fluid, and no, I'm not saying it doesn't matter.

When you practice virtualizing your authentic preferences with the energy of throbbing optimism, you will find some of your preferences being met with mind-boggling rapidity. And not just the ones you think are "easy" for the cosmic forces to deliver up. Some of the huge ones just come sliding in to your reality. But some of the others don't. Why is that? Because our preferences are fluid, and they're all symbols of a certain elevated mode of being (the gift world), rather than ends unto themselves. Ironically though, when we work on imagining having our authentic preferences fulfilled with the understanding that through this imagination we're asking for an evolution in our soul, rather than making a demand for a specific outcome, the specific outcomes that we ask for sometimes come miraculously to pass.

For example, very shortly after I started working on this book, one of my lifelong dreams came true. I was offered a book deal from Balboa

Press, a division of Hay House.

When I began feeling ready to publish a book on soulmaking, I began practicing my throbbing optimism around that matter. (You'll see that a published self-help book is on the list of twenty-five things I wanted as I started writing this book. I wrote that list before I knew it could be published!) And believe me, my optimism needed to be *really* throbbing and *really* extrarational, because the world of book publishing can look grim. All the websites I read told me the process could take years of building an audience platform via a blog in order to convince agents and publishers that I was a viable investment, soliciting literary agents with book proposals, waiting for an agent to be willing to take me on, waiting for an agent to sell my work to a publisher ... on and on. Hay House doesn't even accept submissions of book proposals that aren't from agents! And I don't have an agent!

So how did my agentless self get a book deal? I responded to a contest that Balboa, Hay House's self-publishing division, was having on Twitter. The winner of the contest would get Balboa's master publishing package, worth \$8,000, and \$15,000 worth of promotion. To enter the contest, all I had to do was tweet a 140-character description of how my book would change the world to the company. That's all I had to do—not a formal book proposal—a *tweet*!

This success with a tiny hop was immensely encouraging and spurred my sense of possibility. After learning more about book publishing and promotion and getting involved in the Evolver Network, I realized that my favorite authors were being published by the Evolver Editions imprint of North Atlantic Books. I then decided I would rather have them publish my book. But since they weren't running any contests, I figured I would have to do something pretty great for the Evolver Network in order to get the attention of the editors. So I did—with other Evolver friends, I co-organized the first ever international Evolver Convergence. The Convergence was a deep success that filled my heart and brought into my life many people who are now my dear friends. After we completed it, I did get the attention of the editors I wanted, but by then this was just a juicy cherry on top of an already fantastic sundae.

So I got my book publishing preference fulfilled. But my rad gypsy caravan still hasn't shown up. Am I sad about that? Not at all, because right now I know I'm in the universe where that caravan can happen too.

You see, your vision of your authentic preferences, changing as it is, is important because it's the objective correlative of an intangible subjective state—a total experience of reality, a universe, a world. In other words, your preferences are symbols of, or metaphors for, a life in which your soul is being made well.

Because your visions of your preferences are your own personal symbols for the making of your soul, vividly imagining that their fulfillment is eminent can be a useful means not only of making those specific things happen, but also of getting you into the resonance of a life experience that's bountifully joyous and rewarding.

Let me put it this way—I might think I want a gypsy caravan that's so rad I can hardly stand it—but what I really want is a world wherein I feel generously supported in having disreputable adventures, free to be my expansively weird self.

So while making your soul is absolutely *not* about the stuff (an accumulation of gorgeous accessories and rocking success can be empty, meaningless, and isolating—just look at any Hollywood starlet), your vision of your authentic preferences is very important, because it's your ticket to traveling from the world you're in now (the one which according to you kinda sucks, at least in some dimensions) and the world that's on your side, wherein life serves up giddy surprises with astounding efficiency.

By spending time virtualizing a world in which your authentic preferences are fulfilled, you alter your own morphic resonance so that it can powerfully shape and organize developments in our minds and in our lives for the better.

How to Virtualize

1. Pick a Preference, Any Preference

One of my authentic preferences (something I would still like to happen, even if I were completely blissed out) is to record a freak-folk album. Actually, upon reflection, I might *especially* like this to happen if I were blissed out.

Please note—this is not an especially “realistic” preference. I don't yet

know how to play an instrument (I'm working on guitar—sloooooowly). I don't know how to read music. I don't have any ties to any aspect of the music industry. I've only yet "written" (i.e., recorded myself whistling on my phone's voice recorder) a few little tunes. My optimism surrounding this matter is, indeed, extrarational.

Something that I find very important in this whole optimism process is not to limit the things I hope for to things that I think are realistic based upon my current skills and what's happened in the past. Why? Because the soul can handle. When I alter my resonance, I get swept into currents where I learn things rapidly and I find out I somehow have more resources and knowledge inside me than I realized.

2. See It, Feel It, Smell it, Hear It

This is the fun part. Let's say you share my preference to record a freak-folk album—and let's say you're recording it live. Go somewhere that you can be alone and relax. Take a few deep breaths. Imagine yourself on a stage at a summer music festival. Feel the ruffled linen of your rad threads flutter on your skin as a breeze goes by. Feel the gentle weight of the guitar on your knee. Breathe in deeply. Smell the fresh sweat of the crowd, the inevitable fragrance of illegal herb smoke that rises up from their midst, the yummy summer smell of hot sun on green grass. See your bandmates wearing their quirky robes and fat flower garlands, carrying their handmade instruments.

Finally, hear yourself start to play and sing, and feel your heart opening and going out to all your audience and all your band members as you do it. Hear what the music sounds like. Hear yourself singing, feel your fingers on the guitar strings. Breathe in the great energy from the crowd, the grins on their faces, the sight of all the dancing, swaying torsos.

There's music moving through you that's more than just the love in your mortal heart; it's the grace of a higher power that wants to come into the world and touch people through you. It's ecstatic—your ego fades into the background, and there's a oneness among you and everything around you. You're right where you're supposed to be.

3. Wash, Rinse, Repeat

Now, future denizen of the folk realm—keep that up. If that vision were your authentic preference, I would recommend to you that you set aside ten minutes each day to virtualize it to the max. And when you virtualize it, make sure you imagine it happening in the greatest way possible for you and everyone else who's involved. In other worlds, don't virtualize yourself up there on stage, giving a so-so performance to a crowd that's more focused on selling and buying acid than on listening to you play. Focus on seeing a picture of dynamic harmony, with all elements working together to bring forth something that's just tremendously sublime (i.e., way bigger than your self). Why? Because for some weird reason, life is just crazy about fulfilling expansive, gorgeous dreams like that.

Hops!

Each day we need to take little actions that are in line with the dreams of our throbbing, extrarational optimism. These little actions must also be fun. I don't mean big actions. I don't mean stuff that feels like a drag. I just mean little hip hops that are on the trail.

Hops are “hopeful optimistic practices.” Yes, you're right. That's redundant. It is so redundant because our habitual negativity and existential dread is incredibly redundant. So the stuff that combats it has got to be the same way. Hops are kind of like leaps of faith. Except they're not leaps—because leaps are big and really, really hard. Hops are—you know, just hops. They're fun. Less like soaring across a rocky gulch and more like bouncing—as bunnies bounce.

For example, my response to the Balboa Press contest was not grueling hard labor—it was a fun little adventure. It was a hop. And now one of my topmost authentic preferences in life is a reality.

Hops are much, much easier to do, by the way, when you are practicing your virtualizations with throbbing, extrarational optimism—because optimism has energy in it, and provides inspiration that we might otherwise lack.

Right now, in your common-place book, jot down three tiny hops you

could take in the direction of one of your authentic preferences. Practice virtualizing that preference, and then go take those three hops. Tomorrow, do the same thing. Eventually one of your little hops will turn into a magnificent, effortless leap.

How to End Up in a Horrible World

The premise of the wickedly delightful film *Wristcutters: A Love Story* is that when you commit suicide, you end up in a world that's not hell, exactly—no fire and brimstone—it's just like normal life, except it sucks more: there are no flowers or stars, it's gray all the time, no one can smile, everything breaks and stays broken, and your only friend is an angry Russian guy. Actually—it's a lot like Moldova, a country in the former Soviet Union that Eric Weiner, author of *The Geography of Bliss*, counts as one of the unhappiest places on earth. The film is a parable for the way life works, taken to the extreme. If you go around despairing and acting accordingly, you'll end up in your own personal cosmos of lousiness.

In *Wristcutters*, through an act of despair (suicide), people land themselves in a universe that's even worse than the one they hated so much to begin with. It's not just that one element is worse—it's a total package. It's *all-around* worse.

How to End Up in the Gift World

Throbbing optimism works the same way—except in the other direction. Through acts of hope (hops, or hopeful optimistic practices) people land themselves in a world that's much better than the one they started out with.

It's my experience that the world brought on by throbbing optimism is one where flowers and stars are more intensely lovely, everyone smiles more, *huge* things come together effortlessly, and you have a giant circle of incredible friends who adore you, and whom you adore.

Just like it's fully within your power to make your life worse through acts of despair (including the ultimate one, suicide), it's also fully possible to awesome your life with throbbing optimism and hops.

So dive in to seeing and believing in the arrival of your infestation of koalas, your paradisiacal eco-village and your river of chocolate, because those are your soul's shifting symbols for what a great universe feels like. They help you to conjure the feeling or resonance of that world, and that feeling is your ticket to jumping right into that awesomefied reality.

The Smallest Hop

If you're reading this book, one of your authentic preferences is to recover your daimon genius. To move toward actualizing this preference, there's a specific hop you need to take.

We are now at a threshold in our mythic journey. To cross the threshold, we have to resume our childhood play where we left it off. This is the hop. A hop so tiny it will seem insignificant or silly, but it's not. It's monumental. We need to take up again our favorite imaginative game and play it once more with the same intensity, focus, and sense of purpose that we once gave it as children.

Resuming our childhood play is the symbolic action that will signal to our unconscious that we are ready to receive it again, to adventure through it to discover our daimon. Only by adventuring through our unconscious and confronting all of the magical creatures who dwell there will we be able to move to a stable state of higher consciousness where we are free to be our true selves and to love without condition or distraction.

Everything we've done up until now has been in preparation for this crossing we're about to accomplish. As we enter the dreamworld, we confront the unconscious in us with all its monsters and temptations. To some degree, we've already begun to confront the unconscious: we confronted our guide and spoke frankly to her. Through this confrontation, we regained a portion of our own power, the portion that we need to travel the rest of the way. We need to press ahead in order to

regain our fullest selves.

The hop that we undertake in order to cross the threshold to the dreamworld will strike us as much too simple, much too trivial. We won't want to do it because it seems so completely pointless and ineffectual. It'll take all our optimism to get us into action.

If it seems impossible or too silly to you that resuming childhood play could help to accomplish such a profound task, remember that Jesus admonished that no one who does not become like a little child will enter the Kingdom of Heaven (i.e., the state of ecstatic love-bliss). Sometimes this saying is interpreted to mean that one must become as obedient and dependent on God on the Father as a child to her parent. Maybe. And maybe it means that one must begin to play again.

As children we were much more open to and permeated by our unconscious. We were frequently overtaken by fantasy, we sometimes could not distinguish dream from reality, we could effortlessly play pretend. As we reengage in our own former childhood play, we will freshly activate and bring to the surface our child-self's wide-open relation to the unconscious.

This happens because ways of knowing and being are held in morphic fields that surround certain patterns of acting. When we do a religious ritual, through the pattern of action of the ritual, we engage the morphic field of that whole religious way of knowing and being and become influenced by it. Likewise, when we reengage in our childhood play, through the pattern of action of the play, we engage the morphic field of our childhood way of knowing and being and become influenced by it.

Will you feel foolish moving around the furniture in your living room, creating tents with blankets and boxes? Will you feel ashamed if while painting angels you realize your productions are not of "artistic" quality that would be enjoyed or recognized by anyone else? Yes, probably. The adult ego tends to be humiliated, or at least mildly embarrassed by, the necessity of resuming the play of the child. This embarrassment is a form of alchemical purification. By becoming willing to indulge in child's play, one undermines the ego's pride and attachment to its adult accomplishments and status.

Notice all the reasons your mind offers you for *not* resuming your play. "Nothing will happen," "It's pointless," "I'll be bored," "I have better, more important things to do." Those are all the arguments of the

part of you that's more interested in succeeding by the world's standards than in embodying ecstatic joy and love.

The ego is bored by anything that does not serve its demands for real-world security and power—and your child's play will not do this. To resume playing like a child in the middle of adult life is actually a threat to your real-world security and power, as far as the ego can tell. How will you be professionally or socially benefited by spending hours, time, and money in playing like a kid, the ego wants to know. You won't be benefited. You'll be handicapped.

The journey to the dreamworld takes you away from your ordinary life with its respectable rewards and pleasures. It puts you at real risk. In order to take the journey, you have to be willing to lose what your ego thinks it already has: position and importance, reputation and stability. These things might not survive your descent. Intuiting this, many people never deliberately undertake the journey to the underworld. They do their best to stay on the surface of life, in the ordinary world, shoring up security and influence, bank accounts and reputations. The trouble is, of course, that life on the surface, in the ordinary world, can become quite meaningless and barren.

Many people discover this barrenness in their midlife, after they've achieved all that they hoped would bring them happiness—and find that they are still restless and miserable. Some live their entire lives clinging to the comforts of the surface, unwilling to deliberately go under. This route has its own dangers, which are actually worse than those of a conscious entrance into the dreamworld.

Why is it worse? Because the unconscious refuses to go unreckoned with. It sends destructive infatuations, paralyzing illnesses, catastrophic failures to those unwilling to purposefully attend to it. It does this not out of cruelty, but actually from love. Terrible shake-ups like affairs and illness and failures have a deepening and sobering affect, destroying false attachments and leading us to the core of who we are.

We can avoid having to be blindly subsumed in infatuation or self-sabotaging illness and failure, however, if we are consciously and courageously willing to heed the call to confront our unconscious, our soul, and drop our ego demands. Through this conscious confrontation we can unstick ourselves from webs of desire and terror that would otherwise keep us caught forever.

Some spiritual traditions offer no option of deliberate descent into the dreamworld of the soul and confrontation with the personalities and forces who dwell there. These traditions assert that it's only necessary to concentrate on practicing principles of higher consciousness—unconditional love, patience, kindness, honesty. I intensely value the practice of these principles myself. Yet any work with higher consciousness principles that does not reckon openly with the monsters and temptations of the dreamworld will be perpetually undermined and distorted by the pulls of unconscious fears and desires.

Experiment 4: Crossing the Threshold

So now think back, search your memory. What games did you most enjoy playing as a child? What can you do to enact those games again? Maybe you loved to build forts out of boxes, crates, and blankets. Maybe you liked to swim underwater in a pool and pretend to be a dragon. Maybe you painted pictures of angels. Whatever you liked to do, you must now find a way to do it again this week.

Take time with this. Assemble your necessary materials. Go to the arts-and-crafts store and get paints and paper. Collect boxes and crates. Find a local swimming pool to use. Do and obtain whatever you need, or as close an approximation as possible, to resume your play. Spend at least four hours this week absorbed in playing. Engage those around you, your friends, your family, whoever might be supportive and amenable, to join you in your game.

It may be that you had more than one favorite game that stirred you and absorbed you. If this is the case, prepare to play that game too. Don't stop short or hold back. The more you play—the more you create with the materials that you formerly created with—the more powerfully you will launch yourself across the threshold.

Processing Your Play

After you've played this week for at least four hours, journal about the experience in your common-place book. In your journal, ask yourself these questions:

- ✦ What fantasies, stories or images came to my mind while playing?
- ✦ What do I need to do to deepen or improve my playing of the game?
- ✦ What scenes, materials, or conditions would create the best fulfillment of the game's purpose?

Example Processing

As a child, I loved to dress up and pretend to be a fairy. In the fourth week of my journey, I took part in a summer Solstice celebration that my friends and I set up to be a kind of live theater event and party in which the dark and light fairies would have two separate camps in the same stretch of urban wilderness, and would come together at midnight for a ritual. The plan was this: two of my friends would host the dark fairy camp as King Mab and Queen Morgan le Fay, and I and my partner would host the light camp as Queen Titania and King Oberon.

Even though the celebration was half my idea, my adult mind resisted dressing up and pretending to be a fairy—so much so that I didn't even make myself wings for the night of the party. But I did go through with the game. I wore glittery makeup and a crown; I introduced myself as Queen Titania; I let myself be addressed as “your Majesty,” let others feed me, started a raucous dance around the fire on the rocky ledge where we had our camp (my heart told me to “dance on the edge of the ledge,” after all), and knighted a champion for our light court to do battle with the champion of the dark court at the midnight ritual.

All of this was wonderful, but the most exciting and psychically interesting part of the evening for me came when I was unexpectedly seized by two men sent by King Mab and Queen Morgan le Fay to kidnap me. This was all part of our game, but not a part I had known would happen. I was taken, with play forcefulness, through the forest to the other camp. I screamed and howled in dramatic protest all the way. At

the other camp, they jeered at me and bound me to a tree with a high-hanging vine using rope with Japanese knots that grow tighter as you resist them, and I was kept there until my partner came to rescue me.

At the Solstice celebration, as Queen Titania, I underwent a symbolic kidnapping into the underworld and humiliation at the hands of the dark fairies. It was wildly fun. I realized, though, that I might have undergone this same kidnapping and humiliation in the form of emotional and spiritual suffering if not for the potency of my active and deliberate engagement with the alchemical process through imaginative play. The alchemical journey had led me to directly confront and learn from the unconscious forces within myself (i.e., my attraction to the guide figure in my dreams who represented someone who might carry me to the underworld), so that rather than being taken over and controlled by these forces I could live them out consciously and playfully.

Check-Ins

Write your responses to these questions in your common-place book.

1. Have you drawn any pictures or doodles in your commonplace book? Take a look at what those images show you. What are you drawing? These little pictures can give you hints about what's becoming important to you. How do you feel about your doodles? Why not take some time to draw more elaborate pictures in your common-place book? You could try drawing figures or feelings from your dreams or active imaginations. You might Google search for images from Jung's *Red Book* for inspiration.
2. Through your metta cultivation, are you starting to actually love and feel warmly toward someone you used to feel neutrally about or actually resent? If not, that's fine, but if so, what exactly do you think has shifted in you for this change in feeling to come about?
3. Have you started to synchronistically meet people who share your interest in evolving consciousness? How might you be able to involve them in your play? How might you play together with them

for the purpose of your mutual growth and fun?

STEP FIVE

Enduring Trials

We've crossed the threshold and begun playing our childhood games again. In so doing, we've begun to reclaim the glowing truth of who we are, a kernel that's been long pasted over by the expectations and anxieties of the mad world.

Ogres

What we're doing when we play our childhood games is nurturing the soul. We feed our soul more energy. As we do this, it grows larger and hotter. It's more powerful than it's been in years. This growing strength and radiance attracts trials like a lamp attracts bugs. The hotter and more beautifully we're burning, the more we attract challenges. Naysayers and ogres, wicked witches and other monsters, appear to find out what we're made of. We're walking in the dreamworld now, we've entered their territory.

Many people avoid crossing the threshold and inhabiting their souls their whole adult lives, because they fear the challenges that they rightly sense their radiance would attract. We all know that our light is meant to shine, but shining our light also gives those who would oppose us an easier way to find us. Since we've embarked on this journey, we're open and exposed. We're no longer hiding our true self but instead acting directly from it. We're no longer lying low and blending in.

As we move forward on this path, we find ourselves in friction with

the people and situations in our lives that would prefer we stay small and boring. Interestingly, often the people who are most displeased with our burgeoning evolution are people whose approval of us is key to our ego's carefully laid plans.

Our ego is the part of us who plays the "I am who they say I am" game and loses itself there. The ego comes up with a scheme to get what it wants (usually a version of approval, security, or prestige) and then feels immensely threatened when an ogre challenges its plan. No one on this earth is really an ogre—but people sure look like ogres and other sundry monsters to us when they seem to threaten our demands for approval, security, and prestige.

There are two things we can do when we feel we've been attacked. We can hold on tight to our demands and wage manipulative tactics to outwit and dominate our attacker, or we can surrender and offer nonresistance and love.

If we choose to manipulate and dominate, we may win what we think we want in the short term, but we fail at the ultimate quest. The point of the soulmaker's path is not to get what the ego wants but rather to enter the gift world and to make that world manifest for others also. And one only enters the gift world by surrendering all demands. If we choose to offer nonresistance and love to our ogres rather than manipulation and fear, we will lose what we think we want but succeed in entering the gift world.

Cultivating Innocence

Innocence, like optimism, gets a bad rap these days. We tend to think of it as something exclusively belonging to children or to the developmentally different. For an adult in full possession of all her faculties to cultivate innocence sounds like a weird notion.

I went to preschool at a Roman Catholic elementary called Holy Innocents. Lovely title for an elementary school, right? Yes. It was named after the hundreds of infants whom King Herod had slaughtered in his efforts to prevent the prophesied birth of Jesus.

The day they told me this, I started crying and wouldn't stop until my

mother came to pick me up.

I got the idea pretty well that day that innocence is a liability—it means you're vulnerable and unprotected, available to be slaughtered by any unscrupulous authority that comes along.

We tend to not value innocence as a virtue because we associate it with the extreme vulnerability of childhood. In the process of becoming adults, we all suffered various blows to our innocence that woke us up to the fact that the world isn't always kind, and we ourselves can harbor motives and desires that are significantly less than pure. Within this process, we learn to value sophistication above innocence.

The Problem with Sophistication

There's a bit of a problem with loving sophistication—namely, that “sophistication” is word that describes the process of becoming sophistic—i.e., like a sophist. Let's consider for a few minutes if we want to be like sophists. The sophists were traveling teachers of rhetoric in ancient Greece who charged students lots of money in order to learn the art of rhetoric, namely persuasion. Rhetorical persuasion is, of course, a perennially valuable skill, useful in the marketplace, in law, and in politics—in pretty much everything.

The philosopher Socrates had a major problem with the sophists: he said the sophists weren't interested in teaching their students to discern truth through their arguments—just in teaching their students to sound really great. The sophists offered that it wasn't their concern whether their students used their rhetorical skills for good or for ill, for truth or for falsehood—rhetoric was just a skill like any other, able to be used for any ends.

Socrates insisted that the art of rhetoric, of argumentation and persuasion, should be used to direct people toward the true and the beautiful.

So how did things play out? Well, the sophists got richer and the people of Athens forced Socrates to drink hemlock and die.

Hmmmm. Maybe I'm not yet offering a very convincing case for innocence.

Why Socrates Rocked

My point, though, is this: you probably recognize the name Socrates. You probably don't recognize the name Gorgias, who was the most famous sophist in Socrates' time.

In the short term, the world rewards sophistry because it's an efficient means of achieving results that society already thinks useful (start a war, win a lawsuit) or producing complex arguments that make you look supersmart. Sophistry can be incredibly subtle and fascinating. Most everything studied in modern humanities, for example, is sophistic.

But over time, the world celebrates radical innocence, because it's a means of arriving at truly new thoughts—ideas that reveal something genuinely fresh and valuable, that don't just achieve an already-known and desired end within the socially established game of life, but that alter the whole game itself by revealing new facets of the imaginative and spiritual principles underlying reality.

The new thoughts that emerge from radical innocence are valued across time and throughout the world because they're genuinely liberating, and there is nothing so exhilarating as liberation.

Genuine new thought is always threatening to the social world in which it immediately emerges, because it's not bound by that social game. Therefore, the radically innocent people who bring forth liberating new thoughts can be seen as villains and dangers by the societies in which they live. This is what happened to Socrates.

Socrates was said to have claimed that the only thing he knew for sure was that he didn't know—a statement of radical innocence if there ever was one. Some folks have suggested that that claim was just a wily fake-out on Socrates' part, and that he actually thought himself quite clever.

I'm inclined to think that Plato, Socrates's student who wrote dialogues depicting Socrates at work (dialogues that constitute most of our lore about Socrates), was indeed a wily guy who thought himself quite clever—but that Socrates, the historical figure who was Plato's actual teacher and not just the character depicted in Plato's dialogues, was genuinely a radical innocent. If he wasn't, I don't think he could have elicited so much fresh new thought among the youth of Athens that the authorities would have seen the need to put him to death.

Becoming Innocent

Becoming innocent is the labor of releasing all of the habitual demands, expectations, and unconscious feelings of entitlement that keep us trapped in the mad world. These demands—whether they're for love and affection, recognition and security, wealth and fame, or glamour and pleasure—are all forms of manipulation and violence.

We learned to seek our happiness through the use of these violent demands, because violent demands and threats of scarcity were imposed upon us as children by our adult caretakers who were themselves caught in the false logic of the mad world. In order to recover our daimon and let it lead us to the gift world, we need to become like children again in more ways than one. We need to come back to our basic honesty, abide in our innate optimism, and restore ourselves to innocence.

Demands are the way that most of us seek happiness. They're a feeling of internal attachment to having things happen a certain way. Whenever I'm willing to upset myself emotionally if I don't see a certain result, it means I have a demand for that result.

Though we seek happiness through our demands, it turns out that the more demands we make, the more unhappy we are. How is this so? It's because the more demands I have, the more I'm vulnerable

to things not going my way and therefore to getting upset. This is very confusing to realize at first, especially since we've been taught to latch onto our goals and doggedly pursue them. Isn't it a good thing to demand nothing but the best? As it turns out, no.

Each time we hold a demand for anything, what we are really demanding is that our sense of our self as a separate being, as an ego, become more shored up, special, big, and secure through the fulfillment of the demand. For example, for a long time I held a demand that I finish my doctoral degree. Holding the demand was itself painful and stressful for as long as the demand went unfulfilled, because holding any demand makes me vulnerable to fear and upset if any external or internal conditions threaten the fulfillment of the demand. If I managed to fulfill the demand—if I finished my degree—I might still have experienced pain and stress. Gaining the degree while still holding the demand would have brought me a big flush of ego puff—a feeling that my separate

sense of self is becoming larger, safer, more powerful—which would briefly feel very good, like an intoxication.

But when I receive this powerful sense of intoxication upon the fulfillment of my demand, I soon experience an intensified sense of loneliness and emptiness—I have succeeded in making myself stronger as a separate self, and so now I feel more separate, more alienated than ever.

In order to distract myself from the painful feelings of separation and alienation, I might latch onto a new demand and begin seeking to fulfill it—perhaps now it's time for me to seek after a nice academic position and tenure. Alternatively, I might learn that another way is possible and step out of the game altogether.

Stepping out of the game means becoming innocent. In order to become innocent, I had to first realize that not only is holding demands stressful, but getting my demands satisfied doesn't really bring me to where I want to be. It just yields me ego puffs, and ego puffs are themselves ultimately stressful and isolating.

The more intoxicated I become with ego puffs, the more likely I am to behave in arrogant and alienating ways that make other people less inclined to love and to help me. Similarly, the more unfulfilled demands I hold, the more likely I am to behave in self-pitying or aggressive ways that also make other people less inclined to love and to help me. In both cases, demands—fulfilled or unfulfilled—lead to there being less love, joy, connection, and interdependence in my life.

It's important to realize that in letting go of a demand, you're never letting go of your chances of getting the positive outcome you authentically prefer. Instead, you're letting go of your chances of getting an ego puff from that outcome.

My Trial of Writing a Dissertation

For example, after years of spinning my wheels in misery, unable to write anything substantial for my dissertation, I finally dropped my internal demand to finish my doctoral degree and become a professor. I recognized that the rules that govern academia in its present form don't

resonate with me at all. For an ambitious, tradition-loving Capricorn like myself, this was not an easy thing to recognize. It took months of focused meditation and many long talks with friends.

Yet all that work was worth it. In dropping the demand, I removed the sense of grasping and urgency that the demand had caused me. I stopped seeking a secured sense of separate self from the prestige of having the degree, or the security of having an academic career, and I became no longer uptight about finishing it.

After I dropped my demand, I discovered, a little to my surprise, that I still *preferred* to get my doctorate. Not for any particular reason other than that it's generally good to finish things and that I had the opportunity to finish. So I decided to work toward completing the degree, writing my dissertation for its own sake and not for the plum academic prestige.

As I mentioned, for the three years previous to this surrender, I had been woefully stuck, unable to get my usually prolific self to come up with any idea for the work that inspired me. But giving up on my demand brought me the freedom to plan a dissertation that would explore how poetry can be experienced and taught as a mode of soulmaking. It would be based on my study of Emerson and my work with my Reading Poetry class. This idea made me very happy. I wrote it in two months and titled it "Poetic Inquiry."

After I finished writing "Poetic Inquiry," I presented it to my doctoral committee at the time, sure that they would be thrilled. Instead, they told me they didn't feel it was sufficiently scholarly, that it wasn't a proper dissertation at all, and that they wouldn't agree to let me graduate.

At the moment that I heard this feedback from my committee, I can tell you that these dedicated researchers and teachers who had all shown me immense kindness at various points all looked like horrible ogres to me, because I still had some lingering attachments. So I retreated into practicing metta meditation for all of them until they didn't look like ogres anymore, but simply like people who didn't agree with my perspective on scholarship.

Since we didn't agree, it made sense to gently dissolve that committee and to form an entirely new one. This was something I had never heard of any graduate study doing, and it filled me with trepidation, because I

didn't know if I could find any other faculty members who might agree with me. I bought everyone on my previous committee chocolates and left them thank-you-and-farewell letters in their mailboxes.

By that point it didn't actually matter if I found a new committee; the work itself mattered more than whether anyone in particular approved of it or not. And I had already completed the work. It existed. I could put it out into the world.

As it turned out, I was indeed able to find other faculty members who agreed with my thoughts about what constituted scholarship; they generously agreed to form my new committee and to graduate me.

So now I'm Dr. Carolyn Elliott, and that's nice. And you can read or download "Poetic Inquiry" on my website, www.awesomeyourlife.com.

Today the fact that I have a doctorate doesn't give me any particular sense of enlarged self-importance. It does, however, remind me that I was able to go through a process of surrendering my attachment to prestige in order to fulfill a larger goal of becoming free enough to write something valuable to others. And I do enjoy that.

How We Can Drop Demands

To drop any long-held demand, we need to repeatedly practice multiple strategies:

- ✦ Consciously, repeatedly affirming to ourselves our willingness to drop the demand.
- ✦ Reenvisioning the past in such a way that we provide ourselves with a new set of memories, in which we recall the basic need underlying the demand always already being spontaneously met.
- ✦ Consciously, repeatedly affirming to ourselves our willingness to forgive the past as we remember it.
- ✦ Envisioning ourselves receiving what we've been demanding without any sense of ego increase or solidification coming from that reception.
- ✦ Imagining what it would feel like to be present in our lives without

making that demand at all.

- ✦ Becoming willing to completely love, respect, and enjoy ourselves without that demand ever being met.

This week, single out one of your most troublesome, pressing demands and work on it through these strategies. Releasing even one demand can cause you to feel exponentially more happy and free.

On Being a Pregnant Virgin

Being a soulmaker in the process of creative awakening is a lot like being a pregnant virgin. I know that sounds far out. Stay with me for a moment while we see what that means.

Imagine you're a young, unmarried girl. One night, an angel appears to you and announces: "Hey! It's your lucky day! You're going to conceive and give birth to an incarnation of God!"

How do you feel?

This whole annunciation scene is what happened to the Virgin Mary, and she felt pretty cool about it. But she was saintly to begin with. Let's imagine you're not saintly, you're just a regular person. How do you feel about this news that you'll be bearing the incarnate Lord?

Probably you're freaked. You know you don't want to say no to God, but how are you going to explain the whole matter of you suddenly being pregnant to your family and your nice, chaste boyfriend? And what will the neighbors say? Put bluntly, they'll say you're a slut.

No one's going to believe your whole hilarious Immaculate Conception story. You can try to tell them about the angel and everything, but then they won't just think you're a slut. They'll think you're a nutty slut.

This is going to be a tough deal, and it's not all that hard to understand why.

Virginal women are traditionally accorded some respect and deference by society—they're seen as pure, as-yet-untainted by sexual knowledge and motivation, free from romantic entanglement. In Classical times, the status enjoyed by virgins had so many perks that many ancient Greek heroines took great measures to protect themselves from ever having to

marry.

Women who become pregnant within marriage are also likewise accorded some respect by the culture at large—they're bringing up the future generation with the proper means to support that generation.

Women who become pregnant outside of marriage, especially young women, are conventionally regarded with very little respect. Society interprets them as irresponsible burdens.

But even knowing all this, you've got an offer from an *angel*. You're going to be *bearing the son of God*. So you accept your gift.

Then what happens? People respond to you and your situation with varying degrees of kindness and acceptance, but by and large you're considered morally suspect and spiritually deranged.

You know in your heart that you're not irresponsible, you're not loose with your affections, you have no lascivious motives, you're a servant of the Lord. You're innocent—but no one else can see that. To everyone else, you're trouble.

How Soulmakers Are Like Pregnant Virgins

If you're a soulmaker, the odds are that throughout your childhood and up to the present day, you sure look like trouble to most people around you.

Your inventions, your enthusiasms, your playfulness, your disinterest in material stuff for stuff's sake, your emotional sensitivity, your intense spiritual experiences, your passionate convictions, your disinclination to go along with whatever dominant program is happening at your home or school or work—these all inhibit your ability to fit in, and they make you look morally suspect and spiritually deranged to those around you.

In other words, you're bearing a gift from God: your daimon, your soul. You know it's a wonderful thing, for you and for everyone else. But the sleepers around you don't see it that way. The angel never appeared to them and told them how great you are and what an important service you're doing. They see you as a burdensome annoyance in the midst of their lives. They resent you. They're not shy about letting you know it.

You might be beaten, called names, harassed, ostracized by your peers

and even by your elders.

This is very difficult. You're innocent, and you're bearing a wondrous present to the world. But the world doesn't seem to see or respect your innocence. It appears to treat you as if you're guilty of harming it. It offers you derision, insult, dishonor.

In the midst of all this insult it can be incredibly hard for a poet to maintain her good spirits. It's easy to become cynical, disheartened, bitter when the world addresses you as a guilty person. In other words, it's easy to lose your sense of your own goodness.

Some poets become so disheartened by the harsh treatment that they get from the world at an early age that they abort their gift—they self-sabotage, overdose on drugs, commit suicide, or just live blocked and miserable lives.

I'm very touched and saddened by the story of Nick Drake. Drake was a brilliant British folk artist who recorded some of my very favorite albums and then died from an overdose of antidepressants at age twenty-six. His albums were received with pleasure, but they never sold much during his lifetime because he was extremely reticent and refused to do interviews or tours to promote them.

The already melancholy Drake became more depressed by the failure of his music to sell—and then ultimately he died in a situation that looked a lot like suicide.

Reading the Wikipedia article about Drake's life, I was reminded of two young men I dated in my early twenties, both gifted avant-garde musicians with serious social anxiety. Happily, both these young men are still living and making art. But neither of them is having a gloriously easy time of it, to my knowledge.

One could say that both Drake and the young men of my acquaintance sabotaged themselves by not being more vocal and personable. This is true, but it's just a surface-level observation.

Seeing more depth in the situation, I would posit that they have an extremely tough time being personable because somewhere along the line they stopped believing in their own innocence and goodness. It's tough even to make eye contact when you don't trust the power of your own dear heart. No matter that evidence of their virtues abound—in spiritual matters, believing is perceiving; innocence and goodness are spiritual matters, and without belief they cannot be perceived.

Learning from the Virgin Mary

My point is that without faith in our own goodness and innocence, we will find ways to abort the gift of our genius instead of carrying it fully to term.

I feel I have a lot to learn from the Holy Virgin Mary in this regard. She was someone Kierkegaard also considered a knight of faith, and her story is easier for me to relate to than that of Abraham.

Mary got plenty of harsh treatment from the world in response to her decision to bear her gift, but she didn't let that harsh treatment cause her to doubt her own worthiness to carry and to offer that gift. We as soulmakers need to cultivate a similar faith and forbearance. As we go throughout our lives, we are pregnant virgins again and again, innocent vessels bringing forth incarnations of divinity into the world and in the meantime looking downright suspect.

So now I want to discuss in depth something that I haven't seen addressed in many places that advertise the power of optimism and positive thinking.

The Shadows

The little-discussed fact is this: when you engage in profound optimism, turning up all those bright lights allows you to see your shadows much more clearly.

In other words, when I'm practicing my optimism and my hops, when I'm moving forward on my mythic journey and great things are starting to happen in my life (or I'm even just starting to feel better), I notice that I begin to more sensitively perceive the old messages and patterns that are out of accord with my new vision. They stick out more clearly because they contrast with all the light and joy I'm bringing into my mind through positive virtualization.

I think this is a wonderful side effect of optimism and needs to be responsibly addressed.

As my life today expands in awesomeness at a rapid rate, some old

messages I once received about how I don't deserve to be trusted and about how speaking my truth is dangerous came up again. These messages and the behavior patterns they cause me to enact when I'm unconsciously responding to them can prevent me from realizing my authentic preferences and continuing with my inner journey. I found it to be crucial that as I become conscious of them, I practiced honesty about what happened to me and worked to deal with the distortions those happenings caused.

The Innocence Process

In order to deal with these shadows, I practiced a specific kind of work that reconnected me to my full perception of my real goodness and innocence.

I found this work to be deeply powerful because it altered my self-image—but not in a fake, pumped-up way. It altered my self-image by taking strength away from the distorted self-perceptions I acquired when I accepted the false projections of others and by restoring to me the innocent, positive truth I knew about myself as a child. This self-image is an image of who I authentically am.

I want to share this work process with you. I recommend that you don't undertake it, though, unless you have supportive people in your life who know your story and who know how you're trying to change. In other words, if you don't yet have loving friends or a good therapist or life coach to help you through traumatic stuff from your past, wait until you do before undertaking this process.

1. Go someplace safe and relax. Become aware of the false messages your brain is offering, or the troubled patterns your life is evidencing. Ask, "When did I first think that or do that?"

For me, it's not just that my mind sometimes tells me that I don't deserve to be trusted or that my truth isn't worth hearing, it's that I also have repetitive patterns of doubting and second-guessing myself. When I got really still and asked myself, "When did I first start doubting

myself?” the scene of my being invalidated when sharing the story of my abuse came to my mind.

2. Mentally go back to the scene wherein you received the false messages about you and your worth.

This can be difficult and disturbing to do, which is why I don't suggest doing it unless you have a loving and wonderful person to call if the scene gets to be too much for you.

3. Imaginatively insert yourself back into that scene with your present-day knowledge, and loudly and repeatedly assert the real truth within that scene. For example, I assert: “I do not deserve to be disbelieved and threatened. I do deserve to be heard, loved, and protected.”

Do this again and again until you can feel its truth. For me, I start to feel my heart expand. I start to relax as I declare this truth. What you're doing is insisting on a real and healthy self-perception, instead of the distorted perception that the person who mistreated you projected upon you.

4. Also in the mental scene, loudly and repeatedly assert to the person who mistreated you: “I will not be controlled any more by *your* view of me. The truth is I am not a liar or a threat [or whatever false thing it is they communicated to you back then]. The truth is I am honorable and honest.”

In asserting this, you are continuing to distance yourself from their negative view and reclaiming your positive attributes. This is so important, because the negative view of myself that I formed when I was mistreated as a child will continue to skew my perceptions of my life today, creating for me the same painful situations over and over.

For example, until I do this work, I find myself drawn to form friendships with people who invalidate me and attempt to make me feel guilty and wrong. These friendships feel “right” to me because they accord with the negative vision of myself and how I deserve to be treated that I acquired when very young.

5. Now imagine the scene again—except this time you’re interacting with someone else—not a person who’s mistreating you, but a person who is respecting and connecting with you. In my example, I imagine someone who’s very emotionally present and open hearing me tell the story of my abuse, honoring me, and taking steps to protect me.

This step, like the others, is something I need to do mentally over and over to help it sink in. As I do this, I’m forming new neural connections, which rewire me for new experiences. For example, the more I imagine being heard and honored as a child telling a difficult truth, the more I am able in the present day to be intuitively drawn to people who are willing and capable of receiving what my essential self has to give. I become much less attracted to people who want to invalidate and guilt me.

6. Continue to vividly imagine yourself being treated well and totally adored by someone sane, happy, and loving. Practice seeing your child-self as someone sane, happy, and loving would see you.

The more I do this step, the more I am able to get in touch with and remember all the really cool things about myself as a child that my learned sense of falseness and worthlessness caused me to forget: I remember that I was extravagantly kind to all the other little kids I met; I remember that I was everyone’s favorite storyteller; I remember that I loved everyone I saw; and I remember that I would effortlessly build complex and lovely sculptures out of foam. In short, I was generous, tremendously sweet, and very creative. I absolutely deserved to be honored and treated well.

In doing this I begin to see myself again from the perspective of my own inner truth rather than from the perspective of the confused and hurting adult who abused and invalidated me.

I begin to feel much more free and light, and to see ways in which my optimistic visions for the future can come true.

I stop feeling suspicious of myself and start feeling more at one with my heart.

I gain the power to slay the ogres who assail me.

Unconscious Innocence

Up to now in this chapter, we've been working on restoring our innocence at the level of our personal memory. In order to move forward with the soulmaking adventure, we need to also practice inhabiting our innocence at the level of collective memory, in the dreamworld. We need to delve into the fantasies and images that reengaging in our childhood play brought up, to accept these fantasies as real and important expressions of our soul's life, and to meet these fantasies and the characters that appear in them with our spiritual principles of honesty, optimism, and innocence. As we do this, we introduce our new imagination of ourselves as good, hopeful, and innocent into the deepest level of our unconscious creative soul. This introduction acts like an alchemical catalyst, initiating a reaction in our dream lives and in our outer lives that utterly transforms us and ultimately raises us to a new level of consciousness wherein we experience our innate divinity and wholeness.

Experiment 5: Trials in the Dreamworld

Look back in your common-place book to the place where you recorded the fantasy images and stories that occurred to you as you played last week. Single out one of these to focus upon in your mind's eye. Relax your conscious mind and your critical attention. Bring the image to focus before you, and then sensitively and receptively watch the image unfold and develop. Be aware of the changes that happen in your fantasy. Write down what occurs to you in the form of a letter addressed to your soul. Use dreampeak to address your soul. After you've written down the main elements of the imagination that you see, invite characters from the imaginations to speak back to you in dialogue.

Processing Your Fantasy

After you've written at least three fantasies this week, ask yourself the following questions:

- ◆ What do these mean?
- ◆ How do you feel about what the images show you?
- ◆ What can you do to fulfill your responsibilities to the characters you've met in your fantasies through actions in the real world? What symbolic or actual steps can you take?
- ◆ How will you integrate what you've learned in the dreamworld with your waking life?
- ◆ Now take whatever actions are necessary to fulfill your commitments to the dreamworld.

Example Letter

Soul,

At Solstice on the plateau—a thunderstorm threatened all night to shut down the party. Lightning flashed in the sky over the horizon above the dark camp. Without reason I felt that the lightning really did come from the dark fairies, from their camp. Every time I saw the lightning crack the sky, I thought—yes, that's what's happening. The dark fairies do magic that makes the sky crack with electricity. And each time I thought this, it excited me. I wanted to go over there even though I knew I should stay in the light camp, my province, and keep the festivities there going. I wanted to give up that responsibility to make others do good, to raise their consciousness, to pay attention, to transcend. I wanted to sink down into whatever the electric power came from.

The sky lights striking above, cracklings. The height of the plateau. To join with the light cracking, the electric power. To live as its cause and maker. The men pulled me through mud.

Soul, they kidnapped me and jeered—fights and rope pulling—they came only slow to rescue me.

First I twisted and turned, hung from the tree.

Soul, so I gather you to live as a larger being. I live as your symbol. Soul, I understand that I'm to be obedient to you, to put myself at your mercy, your will.

What do you want for me now?

Carolyn Elliott

And then the soul began to speak to me, in the voice of the King of the Underworld.

Example Dialogue

S: I've captured you, now you're Queen of the Underworld, now you're my queen.

M: I don't think I've ever heard any sillier goth nonsense.

S: You think it's nonsense to be Persephone, Queen of the Underworld?

M: Well first of all, I am not Persephone, I am Carolyn—and second of all—yes, I do think it's nonsense. There are girls all over town who dress up in white makeup and black lipstick and would be delighted to play this game with you—but really I find it boring.

S: Boring?

M: As in very, very trite. Amazingly trite. I'm not interested in being Queen of the Underworld. It's been done. I don't want to trounce around acting like Winona Ryder in *Beetlejuice*. I don't want to be pouty and sullen.

S: That's what you did yesterday, after Solstice.

M: Yes, I felt very depressed. My ego was bruised—everyone liked the dark camp more. Dey and I underprepared—I felt I lost. I felt stressed much of the time during the party, and I had wanted to feel relaxed and grand. That's why I put in so much hard work.

S: But instead of feeling relaxed and grand, frolicsome and happy—

you felt sullen and depressed, and it got worse after the celebration was over.

M: Yes. I felt I'd wasted my money and time and put strain on Dey unnecessarily, foolishly.

S: How terrible of you.

M: Yes it is terrible—money is tight and so is time.

S: You have such fearful beliefs for a queen of light.

M: I try to let them go, but they don't go.

S: Well now you're Queen of the Underworld, so they will go.

M: How?

S: The dead don't need money and they don't need to eat. They have plenty of time.

M: I don't want to be dead. I don't want to be a ghost, I want sunshine and beauty.

S: You have a responsibility to the dead. You need to fulfill it. You must rule them and give them pleasure that they have such a beautiful queen.

M: Responsibility to the dead? What about responsibility to the living? The dead are gone, they don't exist any more.

S: There you go wrong, miss. There you go wrong. They exist. They dwell with you always, the ones that love you.

M: No dead person loves me.

S: Your grandparents.

M: They didn't love me—I was just a toddler when they died.

S: They knew you, your essence. Your grandmother Stella loved you.

M: Yes, she did. She made me a white rabbit fur coat and dressed and fed me after school. And showed me how she drew pictures.

S: So she dwells with you.

M: That's such sentimental nonsense, I can hardly stand it. Of course you're a spiritualist, though—you're gullible for anything that smacks of the occult.

S: Now you're back to disrespecting me.

M: You're just so silly and irrational, it's hard not to—you want to be associated with anything spooky or scary or supernatural. You have no shame.

S: Because I'm King of the Underworld, yes.

M: Well I just think it's childish.

S: Oh?

M: Yes, it is—it's childish to be so obsessed with voodoo and spirits and tarot cards and whatnot. Ouija boards and magic rituals. None of it works. It doesn't help. It doesn't make life any better.

S: You sound bitter.

M: Yes, I'm bitter—the magic I did when I was younger—love spells, whatever—none of it worked.

S: According to you.

M: That's right—no observable effects.

S: Except now a man loves you with total passion and devotion.

M: Well that's certainly a delayed effect—ten years!

S: Also, you are my queen now.

M: You can't have me for a queen. As you know, I'm in a committed relationship.

S: That's fine then. You will be my sister, my Sister Queen. I'm glad you're in the relationship. It doesn't change the fact that now you are Queen of the Underworld with a responsibility to the dead.

Another Example Letter

Soul,

I agree to fall through. I fall down fast and hard, outside the ordinary world. I feel panic as I leave it all. I find myself in an evil court. Everything stands in muted gold and gray, columns and marbles within a palace. I feel desolate. I've lost everything—all my promise, all my hope. I've been grabbed by something larger and

darker than me and taken under. I want my friends and my family. I want to go home. Everything wavers. One moment I'm in the palace at Hades, the next I'm in the fiery wooded canopy of the dark fairy court.

I'm trapped. I've failed. I'm bounded. My hands are tied. I have no future. My magic wasn't strong enough, my friends are not loyal or powerful enough to free me. I'm alone. There's a party going on, loud and raucous, all around me. People are leering at me, or not even paying attention to me. I'm not that important. I've failed. My mood is like a ghostship now, in a dark, empty sea. A dwarf approaches me and tells me a story.

The dwarf says that the king plans to rape me and make me pregnant with his heir. I'm disgusted by the thought. A baby would ruin my life. The dwarf says he loves me and will do what he can to help me escape. He tells me that I must avoid looking into the eyes of the king. I feel so downcast I don't care. A white horse approaches me. He's so beautiful that his appearance cheers me up. The dwarf says that I can ride the white horse out of the camp. The horse comes up and nuzzles against me. The dwarf says we just have to wait for the king and his court to fall asleep from drunkenness and then we can escape.

The horse comes close to me. I nuzzle my face against it and tell it I want to go home. The people of the dark court gradually fall asleep, drunken and satiated with food from feasting. Gradually everyone does fall asleep. A little tree frog comes and unties my bonds. The dwarf and the tree frog say they want to come with me and be my friends.

Now I'm in a hall again, the gray-gold hall. There are picture portraits on the wall. I am not tied up now, I am walking in the hall. The first picture portrait is of a severe, ugly old woman, a school-marm type.

The next picture has a green frame. It's a landscape of a lovely rolling countryside. I step right in. The tree frog and the dwarf come with me.

We find the white horse tied to a tree. We go galloping on the white horse. We're in Elysia now.

A golden ball falls down from the sky into my hands. The white

horse stops. We dismount. We've arrived at a rich meadow where nymphs, beautiful heroes bathe and play.

I sit down near the pool and look into it and find myself very beautiful. The gold ball falls in and sinks. This makes me totally distraught—I'm so attached to the ball, it's precious—I can't stand that I've lost it! It's too heavy for the frog to retrieve. The dwarf goes in and gets it for me. Now there's a small, beautiful golden dog with us, too. A Pomeranian. I'm delighted. I notice that both the little frog and my friend the dwarf are also very beautiful. The meadow is very green and lush. The other youths don't seem interested in talking to me, but I'm not interested in talking to them either.

Carolyn Elliott

More Example Dialogues

A dialogue with the dwarf:

M: Dear dwarf—tell me about yourself—who are you?

D: I'm King Oberon, of the fairies.

M: You helped me escape from that dark court. I'm grateful.

D: If you are grateful to me, then let me be with you.

M: I will do this. Tell me more about you are, what you want.

D: I want to see you free. I want to hear you sing.

M: Sing?

D: You have a lovely voice.

M: Well I can sing for you. What would you like me to sing?

D: Sing "Ave Maria."

M: You're a Christian.

D: No, but it's such a pretty song.

M: I don't quite know the words—can I sing other songs for you?

D: Yes.

A dialogue with the tree frog:

M: Hello Mr. Tree Frog—thank you for untying me. Please tell me more about who you are.

F: I'm an enchanted prince who's been trapped.

M: Ah yes—but you couldn't get the ball for me like the frog in the story.

F: No, I'm not that strong. I'm real.

M: What does it feel like to be such a little frog?

F: It feels lonely. But also peaceful. I love you so much.

M: All my unconscious creatures love me, apparently!

F: You are lovable.

M: I don't feel all that lovable—I feel like an underachiever—I haven't got any money or any career recognition. I don't know what the heck I'm doing.

F: You are none of those things.

M: Thank you, Mr. Frog.

A dialogue with the horse:

M: Hello, Mr. Horse.

H: Hello.

M: Will you tell me about who you are?

H: I'm a very wise old man.

M: But you look young and fast!

H: I'm Merlin the Magician, in shape-shifted form.

M: Thank you for taking me out of the dark court.

H: You're welcome. You're not meant to stay in a place like that.

M: Is there anything I can do to thank you for your help?

H: When you become very wealthy and famous, do honor to me, to Merlin, to the White Horse.

M: I will do this.

Example Trial

I'm at a ball in a forest. I have a resplendent dress. There are lights in the trees. A trumpet sounds.

Dancing starts in front of me. Twelve dancers, all with handsome demonic partners, twelve beautiful ladies, all kidnapped, all made to dance at night.

They're wonderful to watch.

They're performing for me, I'm holding them here.

They tell me I've imprisoned them for my entertainment.

I say, "I want to set you all free, I don't want you kept here in bondage."

They tell me, "Then you'll get bored here alone. You are trapped in your throne. You're in bondage too. You offended the Dark King."

I say, "Dancers, who are you?"

It is then revealed to me that the men are fallen angels, demons who descended to hell after rebelling against God and his angels. The women are maids from Greece meant to be sacrificed to the Minotaur.

I ask, "Why are you dancing together? Where are the Athenian youths?"

The women tell me, "They've already been eaten. So the demons came to dance with us."

The demons are very handsome, very tall, muscular, and broad shouldered.

One couple stands out from the rest.

They are Azrael and Sappho.

I insist to Sappho that she shouldn't be a sacrifice for the Minotaur—she's from Lesbos, not Athens. She offers to me that she's Greek and that's all that matters.

I notice that this is the most beautiful part of the underworld, this grove. I ask Sappho and Azrael why is everything so lovely here? Why don't I experiment ugliness? Why all this fairytale gloss?

Azrael says to me, "You are afraid of ugliness and death. You take it

personally. It frightens you and insults you, the intimation that you will die and be nothing but skin and bones, a corpse some day.”

I say, “Show me my corpse.”

Azrael bids me to turn around and I see that there I am, in the throne, stuck to it. I’m rotted—my face is gray and falling apart—my eyes look gooey and are surrounded by flies. There are holes in the skin on my upper arms and my fat is liquefying and pouring out onto the ground. My body—my face—which I have always taken so personally—is now deflating and green.

Example Processing

♦ How do you understand these fantasies?

Well, let’s see. All three of my dreamworld imaginations are about being kidnapped and trapped in some kind of underworld, which appears to be a cross between the dark fairy court, Hades, and Elysium. In the first imagination, I’m grabbed as I was in play at the Solstice party and taken to the dark fairy court. There, the King of the Underworld, also referred to as the Dark King, informs me that now I’m his queen and I have a responsibility to the dead. In the second imagination, I’m also trapped at the dark court, but this time I’m taken to Elysium by friends of mine—a dwarf King Oberon, a tree frog who is a prince, and a white horse who is Merlin the Magician. In the next imagination, I’m again trapped at the dark court—which this time resembles the palace in the fairy tale of the Twelve Dancing Maidens. The maidens are Greek girls meant for the Minotaur, and their dancing partners are fallen angels. Two of the dancers, Azrael and Sappho, address me. Azrael shows me that I myself am dead and rotting in the throne.

I understand these to mean that at this stage of my path, I’m being asked to embrace and love death rather than to fear it. I’m to confront my own mortality, to stop resisting and disrespecting the Dark King and instead to honor and love him. I think I’m being asked to let go of my attempts to control life, and of my attachment to my egoic, or merely human interests. I’m being prompted to

fundamentally alter my orientation to my life—to stop thinking of it so much as my own and to see it more as energy in the service of larger force. I'm being called to live more fully in symbol and imagination.

- ◆ How do you feel about what the images show you? I feel fine—a little intrigued. I want to know more about why Sappho appeared.
- ◆ What can you do to fulfill your responsibilities to the characters you've met in your fantasies through actions in the real world? What symbolic or actual steps can you take?

Well, I think I can do things more deliberately to honor the dead—maybe starting with my grandmother, Stella. The dwarf asked me to sing—I guess I can sing more. The white horse asked to be honored when I'm rich and famous—that'll take awhile, but I'll do it. I could start dressing and behaving like more of an underworld queen—get a black dress. I could meditate more on the reality of my death.

- ◆ How will you integrate what you've learned in the dreamworld with your waking life?

I'll allow myself to be more reflective about the past and about the dead and death itself. I won't dismiss such thoughts as morbid or childish. I'll allow more of my false demands for security and certainty to fall away, more of my ego's demands for glory. Those kind of demands hinder my joy and my freedom, and cause me to take myself very seriously and to be uptight.

Check-Ins

Write your responses to these questions in your common-place book.

1. Have you tried answering the Truth and Beauty questions in your common-place book yet? Why not? Give it a try for the next few days—see what it helps you to shift.
2. In your metta cultivation, are you beginning to notice that as you practice imagining joy on behalf of certain people you get strong

intuitions about what's holding those people back from joy in real life? What insights does this give you about the way that you hold your own self apart from joy?

3. Are you starting to become less interested in things that used to command your total attention? Is something else drawing your interest now? If so, give over your focus to that new interest. Make notes about it in your common-place book. Give it space and honor.

STEP SIX

Becoming Divine

We begin to become divine by learning to love like the divine loves. And how does the divine love? It loves everyone—including you—freely and without conditions. We've already begun doing this through our ongoing practice of metta cultivation. Now it's time to consider more deeply the power of this work.

Divine Love

Nonconditional love is actually the only kind of love there is. Conditions, or demands, disrupt our experience of this love. Nonconditional love is love that is allowed to flow freely, without any demands disrupting it. It's our natural attitude toward ourselves and everyone in the world, an attitude that gets covered over when we are repeatedly bullied and threatened with the demands of our caretakers and the culture at large as children.

In our initial innocence, we don't know how to stay grounded within our loving perception: demanding and threatening behavior from others is enough to jar us out of our peace. In trying to protect ourselves from the unloving actions and attitudes surrounding us, we shut down and become uptight and demanding ourselves.

As adults we reclaim our innocence in part by learning to refuse to allow demands from ourselves or from others to interrupt our flow of love.

To love someone is to be delighted with her, to feel no need to change anything about her or to manipulate her into doing anything in particular. When we love someone, we take rich pleasure just in her company. We don't require her to be any particular way or do any particular thing. We're relaxed. We feel content and open. We perceive our beloved as a full being, rather than just seeing her in terms of her relative utility in fulfilling our demands for wealth or status, entertainment and thrills, or for anything else. We have no interest in coercing our beloved. We're simply present to adore her.

When our loved one does or says something that conflicts with our inner demands for how we think things should be, we're willing to see her as a dear teacher who's giving us an opportunity to free ourselves and open further. We don't need to criticize her or blame her for what she's doing.

In order to bring forth the gift world, it's essential that we learn to occupy this kind of love for both ourselves and for others.

Often, it can be most difficult to cultivate nonconditional love for ourselves, since we're so used to getting ourselves to perform using emotional pressure, threats, and demands. We do this to ourselves because it was done to us as children.

Think how much time you spend feeling anxious about your success in school or your career. Maybe you make yourself anxious about getting a specific project done on time, about getting ahead of the competition, about winning recognition for all your hard work. Subconsciously, you decide to make yourself anxious (i.e., to use demands on yourself), because you fear that if you didn't use threatening demands and get uptight, you wouldn't do your work and you wouldn't succeed in your career.

Any time you're making a demand in this way, you're sending critical, rejecting energy to yourself. You're not relaxed and delighted in your own company, you're fearful and controlling. Over time, you'll become less and less responsive to your own demands—you'll dread your work, and you may become depressed. Depression and dread are natural responses to constantly being harassed and manipulated by an overbearing person who never leaves you alone—yourself.

How to Effect Positive Change

The only chance of effecting a change in anyone, including yourself, without arousing anxiety or resentment and thereby destroying your enjoyment of love and happiness, is with gentle and accepting communication.

If gentle and accepting communication of your desired outcome does not effect a change, then simply flow with things the way they are. For example, if you know you need to work on a project but you're procrastinating, don't get mad at yourself for procrastinating, and don't recount to yourself fearful scenarios about the awful consequences that will result from your failure to get busy and produce.

Instead, relax. Say to yourself, "I would like for you to work on this and meet the deadline—but it's okay if you don't. I love you and just enjoy being with you." Then take time to feel the truth of that statement in your heart. Feel your own good will for yourself. Feel the love and respect that's present when you drop your demand. Notice how you're a multidimensional being with a thousand astounding and alluring qualities. Notice how petty your irritation and attempts at self-manipulation are. Why would you ever want to manipulate and control a being as wondrous as yourself? Refusing to manipulate yourself with threats and demands is a deep practice of self-respect.

You might fail completely in your life endeavors. You might fall short of all of your goals. Disaster might strike. You may never be able to get yourself to do the great things you want to do. So what? Are you planning on withholding love from yourself if you fail? If you are, then such a plan is making you miserable now. Plan to love and enjoy yourself madly, no matter how you fail or succeed. Plan to love yourself when you fail and you will find yourself loving you more right now. Stop planning to feel disastrously displeased with yourself under any circumstances. Become willing to be delighted with yourself after you've lost everything and foolishly ruined all your best chances and you'll find that you are powerfully guided to success.

I promise if I fail, if I fall short, if I do it wrong and mess it all up irrevocably, I will tremendously delighted with myself. If I make the wrong choices, if I squander all my resources, if I utterly drop it all—I

may pout for a while, but eventually I'll throw a giant party and call myself a vast goddess.

Heart Listening

I want to share with you my experience with learning to see the world through my heart rather than my head, and offer an exercise that can help you cultivate this kind of perception.

I had to figure this shift out because I get really fidgety in meetings. And lectures. And classes. And at parties. Why? My own brain is just so damn loud that it can be impossible for me to listen to anyone else. Even if *I* want to listen to you, my mind does not. My mind thinks whatever you think about the topic at hand is boring and unimportant and it knows it all already anyway, thanks-so-leave-me-alone.

The Opera

Many days, my mind would much rather go to the opera than listen to you or anything else good and wonderful. And by the opera, of course, I mean the hysterically urgent sung drama which is almost always happening in my head, the beloved world classic *My Life Sucks*, featuring the unforgettable grand theme "I Can't Do It, It's Too Hard" and the haunting, bittersweet ballad "No One Really Appreciates Me Because They're Jerks."

The suspenseful question at the heart of *My Life Sucks* is, of course, "Will Carolyn get what she wants?!" a mystery that is ever-compelling because each day there's some new obstacle that looks like it can erase all the heroine's hard work and send her back forever to the dingy suburbs from whence she came. Thus the pathos at the core of the plot never slackens nor grows dull.

After a time, it becomes easy for me to justify staying home and listening to the opera rather than venturing out into the world and trying to listen to you. Because unless you're a major player in the

production (i.e., you have some control over whether or not I get what I want), whatever you've got to say is mere atmospheric chatter. It's much more interesting to just listen to the big songs.

When I give into this attitude, I become very isolated and very depressed very fast. My life, as I like to say, slides into suck. Yes, the opera is a self-fulfilling prophecy. But I've found a major way to combat this pernicious advance of high culture onto the simple joys of my life. I practice something with a really sappy name. I call it heart listening.

My Discovery of Heart Listening

I discovered heart listening one night while at the bookstore before going to hang out with a bunch of my friends that I didn't particularly feel like hanging out with. I was miserable. The opera was playing loudly. I picked up Neale Donald Walsch's *Happier Than God*, where he says something about how if you want to feel wise and loving, make everyone else wise and loving.

So I read this and I'm thinking, "Well, yeah, it would be great to make everyone else wise and loving, Mr. Walsch, but I don't have that kind of power, because all my friends are jerks." And then it dawns on me—I *do* have that power—I can choose to perceive everyone else as wise and loving.

I'm someone who will listen to a person quite attentively when I think that someone is spiritually advanced, or has something deeply important about the nature of life and the universe and being to convey to me. I'm addicted to watching enlightened teachers like Byron Katie, Eckhart Tolle, and Adyashanti on YouTube. I hurry home and go watch "my gurus" like some folks hurry home to go watch their soapy tv shows.

Wherein My Friends Become Gurus

So I went to go hang out with my friends, and I made the decision to listen with rapt attention to each one of them, as if their every word was

the distilled truth of heaven, as if they were the most loving and pure entities in five dimensions.

This takes a lot of focus when your friends are a trash-talking bunch of kids from the East End of Pittsburgh who are really into their iPhones.

But I surrendered my attention; I gave up the opera. I put every ounce of focus on simply listening to my friends' voices, not on trying to dissect or judge whatever they were saying. I told myself I didn't have to agree with or argue with their ideas, I just had to listen to the intangible truth and love that emanated with their words. I would look at each friend and think, "I hear the spirit speaking through you."

The experience I had that night was very potent and very weird. First of all, I noticed that everyone actually said things that were way more wise and beautiful than usual. And I don't just mean "I discovered that my friends were saying deep stuff all along, I just hadn't been tuned into it." No, I mean, they had *not* been saying deep stuff before. They miraculously started to. I could see the looks on their faces as they spoke—an utterance would emerge and it was clear that they were *surprising* themselves.

Part of this must have been that my friends felt more properly heard, because I was really listening, so they felt more free to speak honestly—but I also think that part of this was that the specific variety of my attention, an attention that carried with it a focused belief that what I would hear would be directly from the spirit, actually organized a morphic field that drew forth from my friends the part of them that does indeed have access to a larger kind of wisdom.

The Euphoria of Heart Listening

Something else really weird happened. As each friend spoke, I could feel an energy transfer happening. The effect became stronger the longer each individual talked and the more time I had to zero in on him or her.

It was as if a tube or channel opened up between me and the other person. Through this channel I received tender, effervescent energy directly from their heart into mine.

By the end of the night, I was *buzzing* on this energy. Seriously—I felt

ecstatic. I was dancing around and singing. I wanted to hug everyone a lot. I couldn't stop smiling. This was not normal behavior for me at this time in my life.

I continued to practice heart listening—because it felt so good and gave me so much energy, while the opera totally drained me—and soon the dancing around and wanting to hug everyone became very normal behavior for me, became my standard reputation.

I laugh often and loudly. People often tell me that I'm the happiest person they've ever seen. One of my newer friends teases me that he can't imagine me ever frowning.

How Heart Listening Grows Intuition

An additional interesting thing about this is that when I practice heart listening, my intuition becomes much more sensitive. I can look at a person and a knowing about what her motives are just jumps into me. I know that this knowing isn't coming from my mind because there's nothing judgmental or fearful about it. It's not like, "Oh, that person's up to no good." It's a simple and compassionate understanding: she wants to be liked; he doesn't want anyone to know he's afraid; she feels misunderstood.

When my intuition increases in this way, I become better at positively interacting with people, because I more clearly see what they individually want and need. I don't subject everyone to the same blanket assumptions.

At the time I started practicing heart listening, I had also been working with metta cultivation. In my later experimentation, I've found that the two go hand-in-hand. Heart listening doesn't have the same euphoric, radically opening effect when I'm not practicing metta cultivation. But when I am—wow, wow, wow.

And again—I don't think that I'm uniquely psychically gifted that this energy transfer stuff can happen. I think we're all just connected through the field of the soul, and the kind of intention and energy that we put out into the field has a deep effect on what we receive.

Experiment 6: Becoming Divine

We've discovered our own personal myth as we've traveled through each of the previous experiments and through our adventures with taking steps in the real world to actualize the information we receive from our dreamworld. The discovery of our personal myth gives potent clues that tells us what aspects of divine personality our soul is ripe to grow into.

By now, you will see a story arc emerging in your life, your dreams, and your fantasies that you've recorded in your commonplace book. If you're familiar with major mythologies and religious traditions from around the world, it's probably apparent to you that elements of the adventure you've been undergoing as you travel this path match with events in the legends of at least one of the world's famous deities.

This is a strange realization: an ancient deity is not just a fabled name in a dusty book—she's a living reality, an archetypal pattern in your unconscious who is living through you and making things happen both in your life and in your dreams.

The more you ignore this deity and try to go about living an ordinary human life, the more you'll suffer. Why? Because you weren't meant to live an ordinary human life—no one was. You're meant to live in radical divine ecstasy. You're meant to experience yourself as a luscious, enlightened, unstoppable center of bliss and primal power.

The pioneering psychologist Carl Jung warned against identifying with the divine archetypes within us—he said that doing so could lead to a dangerous sort of ego inflation.

Yet cultivating an imagined, felt identity with a divine archetype is a central practice in Tibetan Buddhist tantra, and one that has been leading people to experience a profound elevation in their consciousness for thousands of years.

Lama Thubten Yeshe, in his book *Introduction to Tantra: The Transformation of Desire*, made clear that anyone with a deep, altruistic commitment and willingness to emerge from the suffering of the mad world can practice envisioning themselves as an enlightened archetype to helpful effect. I highly recommend this book by Lama Yeshe, and also Reginald Ray's *Secrets of the Vajra World: The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet*, to anyone interested in learning more about this potent form of

meditation.

Two key preparations for practicing deific identification without experiencing ego inflation are to become innocent of our demands (as we have already begun to practice) and to nurture what the Tibetans call *bodhicitta*, the loving wish to realize enlightenment (i.e., the kingdom of heaven on earth or the gift world) for the sake of helping all others, rather than merely for the sake of one's own personal gain.

With these two preparations in place, we can begin to practice identifying ourselves as a deity in meditation. This meditative identification shifts the image we hold of ourselves in our morphic fields.

This shift of self-image thereby programs the field (our soul) with new information about who we are and how to evolve us. As we imaginatively identify with the deity, the morphic field begins to work on us to cause us to grow into the sublime qualities of that deity. We begin to think divine thoughts and experience divine sensations. This imaginative identification activates profound potentials of our being that would otherwise go unawakened as long as we continued to imagine ourselves as ordinary humans.

Learn to Practice Deity Meditation

First, learn as much as you can about the enlightened deity you intend to become one with. Research and read about her. Record your findings in your common-place book. Find artwork and pictures that represent her. Collect these too.

Next, begin to practice this work after your daily session of metta cultivation. Come out of deep meditation and affirm your *bodhicitta* intention to become enlightened for the sake of helping all other beings. Feel the compassion in your own heart, your genuine desire to bring everyone out of suffering and into the gift world.

Now close your eyes and bring to your mind an image of the deity. See yourself merging into that image. Feel the deity from the inside. Feel her limbs, her garments, taste the taste in her mouth.

Repeat to yourself statements about who you are and what powers

you have. Feel into this identity, these qualities. Feel the energies of the deity. Know what she knows. Don't be discouraged if you're unable to come up with clear images or clear sensations. It's enough to begin just by intending oneness with this deity.

You're reaching to access the morphic resonance of a fully awakened archetype, and this reaching is like tuning the dial of a cosmic radio to hear a desired station. It may take some time until you can tune yourself properly to find the resonance of the chosen deity. Persist in your efforts. You were meant to do this. This is the shape, terrible and marvelous as it is, that your soul wants to grow into.

It is up to you to nurture your soul by connecting it to these divine images and feelings. Remember to see yourself not only as possessing the attributes of the specific deity you're working with, but also as possessing the basic attributes of divinity in general: enlightenment, total compassion, and total power.

It's important that you don't see yourself as merely "pretending to be" the deity, but that you practice allowing yourself to know that you *really are* the deity. This means you need to discard ingrained, ordinary modesty and step over the giant taboos that say it's blasphemous to see yourself as divine.

Those taboos are in place not to help you but to keep you stuck in the mad world. You're allowed to know yourself as an awakened deity. You're allowed to come out of the closet as perfectly illumined and divine. You are free to not hide your true nature anymore—you've discovered it in your dreams and in your fantasies, and now you need to own it. Don't let superstition hold you back. Be willing to be divine for the sake of all those who are suffering. Be willing to help them by accessing your divine grace and power.

As you practice this meditation consistently over time in conjunction with metta cultivation you'll automatically drop many of your remaining demands. You'll feel less attached to the petty worries and problems of your life. You'll become more capable and more effective. Eventually, you'll become grounded in ecstatic joy, able to live your life from a place of serene yet buoyant bliss.

You'll eventually know you're not pretending and not merely imagining. You'll live life as the deity that you are, and you'll grace us all.

In your common-place book, write about your experience with your deity meditation.

Example Deity Meditation

My experiments, which I've related so far, showed me a clear relationship between myself and the Greek goddess Persephone. Persephone was the daughter of the goddess of the harvest, Demeter. One day while Persephone was picking flowers in a field, the lord of the underworld Hades kidnapped her and brought her to the land of the dead to be his queen.

I researched about Persephone and learned that the Greek stories about her are thought to be based on older, darker tales about a Goddess of Death who was also the source of all life—a dark mother. I also saw that the Greek depictions of Persephone were rather stony, stolid, and cold. These depictions seemed to emphasize her more as a frozen maiden and less as an actual formidable queen.

Yet it occurred to me that I knew of another chthonic Goddess of Death whose depictions are much more terrifying and dynamic: Kali. I decided I would practice my meditational deity identification with Kali rather than with Persephone, since I sensed that the horror of Kali as a simultaneous Goddess of Death and a fearless mother was closer to the older and more fundamental imagination of Persephone, which the later Greek stories glossed over by depicting Persephone as more of a dead goddess than a Goddess of Death.

As I first began to practice identifying with Kali in meditation, I used the following avowals, which will perhaps inspire you to start to invent your own:

I accept who I truly am—the Goddess of Death and the Terrible Mother, the one who eats all and is the source of all. I am enlightened, all-loving, fearless, and I drip with blood. I am death. I am sex. I am the generator of new life from the soil of corpses. I am the mother who eats the babies alive. I am garlanded by the severed heads of my worshippers. I accept that this is the truth of who I am. I am the fierce one, gleefully violent, destroying all

delusions.

Check-Ins

Write your responses to these questions in your common-place book.

1. Have you tried heart listening this week? What was your experience like? Do you think you'd try it again?
2. Are you noticing large bolts of energy from your metta cultivation? What are you doing with this energy? How can you best channel it to fulfill your highest purpose?
3. What did you experience during your deity meditation? How do you notice yourself embodying traits of that deity in your daily life?

STEP SEVEN

Taming Your Genius

In the past six chapters, you've undertaken a massive journey. You cultivated honesty, innocence, and optimism. You crossed the threshold into the dreamworld and began to inhabit your divinity.

Now comes the great task of unearthing your genius and sharing it with others. Your work is to bring others to the same expanded condition of awesomeness that you now enjoy.

Why should that be? Why can't you just kick back, relax, and enjoy your awesome life? Why do you need to do the work of awesoming the lives of other people? For the simple reason that in the realm of spiritual bounty, we keep what we have only by giving it away. Joy, bliss, ecstasy, love, and creativity need to *flow*. They can't be bottled up or else they go stagnant and rot.

Now that you've journeyed inward and worked a transmutation on yourself, you need to communicate your evolution to others so that they can also partake of it.

I invite you to share this book with people around you who comment favorably on the transformation that they see in you. Tell these friends about the adventure you've undergone, how it's changed you, then encourage them to make the same experiments.

Everyone deserves to live their own personal legend, and now that you've started doing it yourself, you're qualified to inspire others to take the trip.

But sharing this book in itself isn't enough. You also need to tame and nurture your genius spirit and keep bringing manifestations of your own

unique realization into the world.

Experiment 7: Taming Your Genius

Before you can tame your genius spirit, you have to find her. So where should you go digging for your genius? In the unassuming place she's been calling to you from all along: your common-place book.

Read back through your common-place book and discover the wonder you've created there over the past weeks. Review your highlights and your shadows, your records of your experiments, your dreams, your reading and researches. As you read, be alert to the presence of an alien wisdom: flashes of beauty and insight that shock and delight you even though they came from your own pen.

These flashes are the manifestations of your genius. Circle them or otherwise mark them for later. Be aware that these are the raw material out of which you will distill your genius into fully embodied life.

Here it is crucial to acknowledge that imaginatively confronting your genius is a dangerous and tricky proposition. Daimon spirits (i.e., geniuses) are notoriously amoral. They have no particular concern for the well-being of your mortal form on this earth or for the bonds of love you've worked so hard to forge with others.

This is why we have to balance our search for our daimon with the practice of spiritual principles and the cultivation of our hearts. Your daimon is the potent essence of your unconscious. Symbolically speaking, she's made of mercury. Mercury is both extremely beautiful and extremely toxic when handled incorrectly. Many brilliant creative people have been destroyed by their genius because they failed to fully feed her demands, appetites, and impulses with love.

A major source of confusion that leads to these destructions is the popular notion that it's important to create art for art's sake—to create for the sake of creating. This notion has a kind of common-sense currency in our culture and an aura of glamour, but it's false because it ignores the fundamental spiritual fact that every act of creation also includes with it a necessary and equal act of destruction.

When creative work is consecrated to the great work of transmuting

elusive genius mercury into the steady gold of self-realization, the creative act destroys the ego at the same time that it builds up the divine center.

When creative work is *not* consecrated to this purpose, the creative act destroys the human person at the same time that it builds up the ego. Art for art's sake would be a great principle if it were possible to create without destroying at the same time. Since it is not, though, we must have art for the divine's sake, or else we will consume the best part of ourselves and be left as starving and empty shells.

The genius craves inspiration: she craves altered states and fresh perceptions. She will have them either through evolving closer to the divine or through devolving lower into the world. This is how some people with great genius come to die of drug and alcohol addiction: they seek inspiration in intoxication and are thereby ruined.

The only means of inspiration that satisfies the genius without wrecking the body and mind is divine inspiration. This can be sought through prayer, meditation, service, altruistic commitment, and the act of creation itself. What's important in all these efforts are the quality of intention and desire for illumination held by the soulmaker.

At the same time that our genius is dangerous and amoral, we need her to help us realize our highest potential. She is our direct connection to the divine. Without her, we are doomed to secondhand mysticism and conventional experience. We are sentenced to lives of quiet desperation. She is the spark of all great art, sex, joy. We can't afford either to ignore our genius or to give her free rein. What, then, to do? We must confront her directly and nurture her with everything we have.

This practice is based in Jungian shadow work and the Tibetan Buddhist and shamanic practice of *chöd*, in which one feeds one's demons. Until she's given proper love, your genius daimon is a demon. If you want to learn more about this practice, I highly recommend the book *Feeding Your Demons*, by Tsultrim Allione.

To fulfill the experiment, take these steps:

1. In your common-place book, write a vivid imaginary description of your genius demon based on what she's revealed to you so far.
2. Settle into your deity meditation from the previous chapter. Affirm your altruistic commitment. Imagine yourself as the enlightened,

radiant being you truly are.

3. When you feel that you've established an expanded sense of compassion and freedom in your heart, visualize your genius demon sitting across from you.
4. Ask her what she needs from you in order to thrive, and listen to her deeply. Notice the ways that what she asks for conflicts with your ego attachments and sense of self-protection. She might be mean and intimidating, but hear how hungry she is. Open your heart to her hunger and her suffering.
5. Decide that you are willing to feed your genius demon with everything that you hold dear: your body, your ego, your comfort, your pleasure, your security, everything. Decide that you will offer to feed her with yourself. Be aware that she will definitely take you up on this offer; she's hungry. Also be aware that deciding to consciously and generously nourish her with an open heart is a magnificent choice. If you don't do this, she'll just feed on you anyway as she's been doing your whole life up to this point.
6. Express your compassion for your genius demon's hunger and offer to feed her with your very self.
7. Listen to her accept your offer.
8. Imaginatively see your genius demon devouring your enlightened deity form, which turns into nutritious and filling nectar. Imagine that your genius demon eats and eats this nectar of you until she's satisfied.
9. Notice how your genius demon looks after she's satisfied herself by devouring you. She probably now appears much less dangerous and intimidating. Pay close attention to her now—does she have any words of wisdom to offer you? Write down your notes in your common-place book.
10. Repeat this meditation daily until you feel that your genius demon is truly fed and has now become your ally on the journey of awakening.

When I was first writing this book and experimenting with confronting my genius, I didn't yet know about Tibetan chöd practice. I had only

Carl Jung's *Red Book* to inspire me. In the *Red Book*, Jung bargains with his inner archetypes a lot, so that's what I tried doing.

If you don't yet have sufficient metta and bodhicitta to be willing to totally feed your genius demon with your whole being, then you may want to bargain with your genius. I can say that this bargaining produces results eventually, but it's a very tough route.

Example Genius Negotiation Dialogue

As I was first working on this book, my genius demon revealed to me that her name is Elsinore Finch. She's a woman in her midthirties, with very beautiful velvety brown hair. I saw her decked out in a silk slip, furs, and pearls, lounging in a tent on cushions by lantern light.

I bargained with her in the following dialogue:

Me: Hello, Miss Finch.

Her: (she's smoking, looks up) Who are you?

M: I'm Carolyn. I've come to speak with you. I need to have a transformative relationship with you. I need your sexual energy and creativity to catalyze me. I need you to initiate me into shamanic arts, and I need you to lead me to the gold of my higher self.

H: You sure want a lot.

M: Yes ma'am, yes, I do.

H: What will you give me in exchange for this initiation?

M: Give you?

H: What will you trade me?

M: Miss Finch—I don't know. What do you value? What do you want?

H: I want your love, your soul, your body, your sex, offerings of incense, fine lingerie, pearls, fur, fine perfumes.

M: I don't have the money for new furs and perfumes. I already have some in my bedroom. You can have those.

H: Good. I'll take them. They are mine.

M: I won't give you my soul—that's too high a price. You can't have my body, either, not forever. But I will do a theater piece and invite you in, just for the duration of the piece, in a contained way. I'll offer you that brief embodiment.

H: That's a paltry gift.

M: I can't offer you more. I can't offer you full possession. I have a heart and a life to protect. You're not trustworthy. My body and soul are mine. You can't have them. What else can I give you in exchange for initiation to deeper creative and sexual power and to my highest self?

H: Change your name.

M: What?

H: Change your name to mine. Honor me.

M: I can't do that full time—but I'll take your name as a stage name, as a performance name.

H: That will do.

M: What else can I give you, Miss Finch? I want you to feel satisfied. I want you to feel free to work with me, to take me to the furthest depths.

H: Cut off some of your hair and give it to me.

M: Anything else?

H: You must dress up more—wear silk camisoles and fur, wear sexy, slinky pants—wear jewelry. Be more feminine. Don't be a mouse.

M: What else? Please ask everything so we can fully negotiate this—I truly need your help.

H: You must do this show of yours more than once. You need to do it multiple times, and different iterations of it. You can't just give me a brief life. You have to keep doing it, keep going.

M: How many times?

H: Twenty-seven. Once for each year of your life. I will tell you who to do it for. I will tell you what goes in the show. I will make it happen. People will want to see this show. It will be spectacular. Don't worry about people wanting to see it. I will also tell you what

to write to finish it. You may be quite honest as you bill the show—tell everyone you are in a daimonic/shamanic initiation, in a pact with me. Let them know what's going on. I must have this public embodiment twenty-seven times for your initiation to be complete. I know you are daunted by that, you can't see how it will happen—but it will.

M: Through this, through me doing this show twenty-seven times, you agree to deepen, expand, enrich my creativity and sexuality, and integrate me with my highest self, for the good of all? You agree not to destroy my life, take me over, or hurt the ones I love?

H: I agree, but the ones you love will be hurt if they can't accept you or keep up with your growth.

M: But you won't take me over and cause me to do something against my morals?

H: I will not. Listen, I will give you exactly what you ask for.

M: Okay—so please tell me exactly what this initiation will entail. Please tell me what I'll be able to do after I undergo it.

H: You will have the power to heal people—to activate psychic powers in them. You will have psychic abilities yourself. You'll speak from wholeness and not your little ego. You'll be free of fear. You'll live in the ecstasy. You'll have boundless compassion and receptivity. You will be totally connected to your intuition and empathy. You will essentially be healing people *from* that ecstatic state. That is you—your ecstasy is you fully connected with your highest self. That is what your transformation will do for you. That is what my initiation will do for you.

M: That sounds too good to be true.

H: You have to stop thinking that. If you're going to work with me, you have to trust me.

M: But I always thought only God could bring me to that state.

H: I am a part of God. I am a catalyst to take you from one state to another.

M: Okay. I believe you. So that's the end result of the initiation. What will happen along the way?

H: Well, you'll start to become much more ecstatic and psychic as we travel. You'll be able to give readings. You'll become wealthier. You'll see artistic success. You'll see synchronistic happenings to facilitate the twenty-seven performances—along the way you'll meet many more guides—you'll be on a great adventure—you'll go around the world. You'll change very much. You'll lose your hang-ups. This will start immediately. You can feel it starting now. I'll show you how to write your book and teach your class—both books and both classes. They'll be more successful than anything you've done before—

M: Wow—you're offering me a lot. Are you really going to do all that?

H: Yes.

M: Why?

H: It's what you've bargained for—and besides, it's fun for me. I'm getting excited now. I see you can do a lot in the world for magic and alchemy, you're really willing.

I never was able to complete the twenty-seven performances that she asked of me: they were too threatening to my ego. Demons always ask for a lot. Perhaps since I didn't hold up my end of the bargain, Elsinore was unsatisfied. She started causing me to act in grasping and thoughtless ways, and soon I entered an intense leg of my journey of awakening that damn near killed me. It would take a whole other book to describe that trip, but suffice it now to say—she possessed me, and it was very unpleasant.

Ultimately, I deepened my bodhicitta through the extravagant pain of that trip, and I finally became willing to nourish her and all others with everything I have. Now she's made good on almost all that she offered me in our initial dialogue. I'm now far more psychic and ecstatic than I used to be.

I have full confidence that as I continue to strengthen my altruistic commitment and action she'll continue to supply me with her gifts and energy.

Check-Ins

Write your responses to these questions in your common-place book.

1. What's your plan for sharing your genius in the world? Where will you start? If you feel overwhelmed—heck, even if you don't—make a list of five simple little hops you can do that will carry you forward. Make sure that all of these hops are tiny and completely doable within one day. So doable that when you think about doing it, you're like, "Oh? That? That's half of nothing!" Now go do that. Half of nothing is actually half of everything.
2. What does it feel like to nourish your genius with your whole self? If you're feeding your heart each day with metta cultivation, and acting on that cultivation with heart listening toward others, what can you do each day to actively nurture your genius? Write a short poem, draw a sketch, cook something delicious in her honor?
3. What hesitations or fears do you have about sharing your creativity with the world? Are you concerned that you'll be dismissed, laughed at, or ignored? In my experience the most potent antidote to fears of this nature is to practice metta cultivation toward your past detractors. See those folks blossoming in ecstatic joy, and you'll realize that if they had been happy they would have never put you down in the first place. This realization can give you the perspective to see that anyone who's cruel to you is suffering—and seeing this allows you to feel compassion, rather than fear, toward anyone who might be inclined to insult you or your work.
4. What has your experience of this book been like? How would you describe the change that's happened in you? Ask your friends if they notice anything different about you and take note of what they say. Don't hesitate to share this book with them if they tell you they're interested in learning more about how to make what happened to you happen to them. Remember, genius is nurtured by love, and love is in the energy of the gift.

Good luck out there, dear gorgeous genius!

EPILOGUE

Connections

I probably haven't done enough—and I probably *couldn't* do enough, to stress how much playing with others is key to the work of curing the suffering that genius can cause. I couldn't have tamed my own daimon without the help of my magical friends who love me when I'm miserable and throw insanely great parties with me when I'm happy.

All of which is to say, in order to grow, you need other magic people with active geniuses. You need to gather them up and involve them in your play. For me, organizing parties is my favorite way to play.

Perhaps you have another thing that rings your bell: maybe you like to play kickball while wearing aluminum-foil hats, maybe you like to build blanket forts, maybe you like to create tiny villages for elves (this was Jung's major game—don't knock it till you've tried it). Whatever it is, start doing it and invite others to help you.

Enjoying ecstasy alone at home while virtualizing is pretty great—enjoying ecstasy in concert with others while playing and pretending can be ten times as amazing because of all the other fields of love and brilliance present there to resonate with and amplify yours.

Since you're on this path and you've read this book, you're resonating with me, and I would love to know you better and let my friends get to know you. I hope you'll come join us in the free Facebook group I facilitate for magic people. It's called the Dreamer's Tantra, and you can either just search for that on Facebook and then click "request to join" or you could type in this link:
www.facebook.com/groups/thedreamerstantra.

I hope you'll also feel free to play with me on Twitter. My name is [@carolynhoney](#).

To get updates from me regarding rad stuff, I'll be doing in the future you can go to my website, www.awesomeyourlife.com, and enter your email address to join my mailing list.

I also highly recommend getting involved with the Evolver Network as an organizer or participant: www.evolvernetwork.org.

I gratefully do one-on-one sessions with magic people in a state of spiritual emergence or crisis or with folks who just need some inspiration, and so I invite you to check my website (again, that's www.awesomeyourlife.com) to find out how to schedule a conversation with me.

Finally, I would love to be able to offer all my one-on-one sessions, writing, and events for free. If you've benefited from this book, I invite you to consider committing to a weekly gift of twenty-five cents (or whatever suits your heart and budget) to kindly support my ongoing existence and efforts. You can do this via the crowdfunding gift-economy platform Gittip.com. My Gittip account profile can be found under my Twitter name [@carolynhoney](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo by Stephanie Strassburg

CAROLYN ELLIOTT, PhD, is an intuitive counselor, a teacher, and a leader in the Evolver Network. Her doctoral research, which gained national recognition from the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, focused on the relationship between creativity and the soul. In addition to maintaining her popular blog *Awesome Your Life* (www.awesomeyourlife.com), Carolyn is the author of *The Arcana*, an alchemical screwball romance novel, and *The Poetical Remains of the Late Mrs. Shivshakti Khattananda*, a book of interdimensional poetry.

Elliott's poetry, which has appeared in *The Oakland Review* and *Whiskey and Fox*, has won the Rose Kurhan Shapiro Prize as well as the All the World for Love Poetry Contest, judged by U.S. Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky. She also facilitates a free, bustling Facebook group for geniuses to support one another in awakening through the use of imagination and metta, the Dreamer's Tantra. She heartily invites you to join it.

ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

PIERCE MARRATTO was born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he grew up loving art and music. During his early adolescent years, he studied a range of traditional mediums in a series of advanced art classes.

Around age eighteen, he moved to Miami to study fine-art photography. While there, he started The Luminos Collective. This is essentially a group of artists all interested in exploring visionary concepts and techniques. This collective really helped him come into his own, especially in regard to creative style and outward presentation. Furthermore, it strengthened his resolve in the notion that the best things in life stem from collaboration. He stayed in Miami for a few years after college but eventually returned to his hometown. Once he was back in Pittsburgh, he took part in founding Touchfaster, which is a hub for local creative of all mediums. He still resides in Pittsburgh, where he continues to build his company, work on his art, and aid in the advancement of other local artists and musicians. For more information and portfolio images, visit Touchfaster.com.

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